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The Lord of Tronerico.....by Stanton Coblentz 12

Because Hannibal Spratt, inhuman dictator of Tranerica, wanted lovely Celia Stanwick, his exploding time-machine made a space-devouring Catalyst of the Fourth Dimension, and sucked Celia out of 1938 into the mad mechanical hell of 2439!

2 GREAT LONG SCIENCE NOVELETTES

Mutineers of Spoce.....by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach 69

Doomed by an interplanetary racketeer to slave their lives away for the rejuvenating sulphur crystals of Jupiter, what chance had those frail Terrestrials to escape the monstrous Jovians and blast their way 550,000,000 miles to Mercury and revenge!

Quest of Zipontoric.....by Robert Moore Williams 88

Within that amazing bubble of flame was a beautiful girl, her hand holding a scepter symbol of Zipantoric—her gesture condemning Dick Merkle and Dr. Burstone to the terrible wrath of a Mayan fire god's incredible scientific devices!

2 SUPER-SCIENCE SHORT STORIES

The Mercurian Menace.....by Nelson S. Bond 59

What fiendish creatures of flame lived on that macabre terrain which was the dark side of Mercury? Aided by the bouncing-ball humans of the hot side, Buzz Carson plunged too late into the chill anti-hell necromancy of that inexplicable land to join a lovely girl in a destiny of disintegration!

The Message from the Void.....by Hubert Mevity 85

Mutual misunderstanding between Mars and Earth—because of two factors in the abstract beyond their comprehension!

SCIENCE DEPARTMENTS

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* * * * *

The Dynamic Cover

The editors of DYNAMIC SCIENCE STORIES felt that it was only fitting that the acknowledged greatest of science-fiction artists should do its inaugural cover: Frank R. Paul pictures a dramatic scene from Stanton Coblentz' novel "The Lord of Tranerica."

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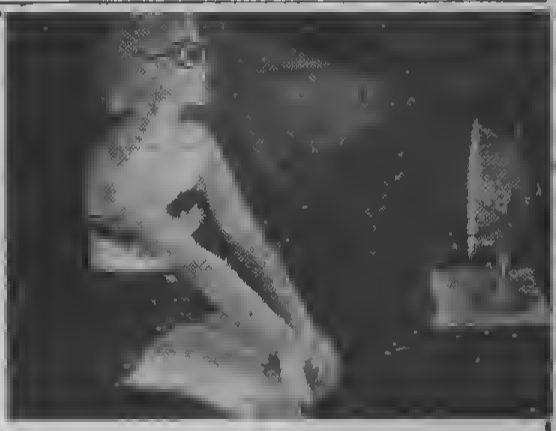
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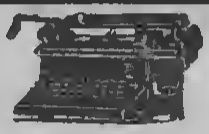
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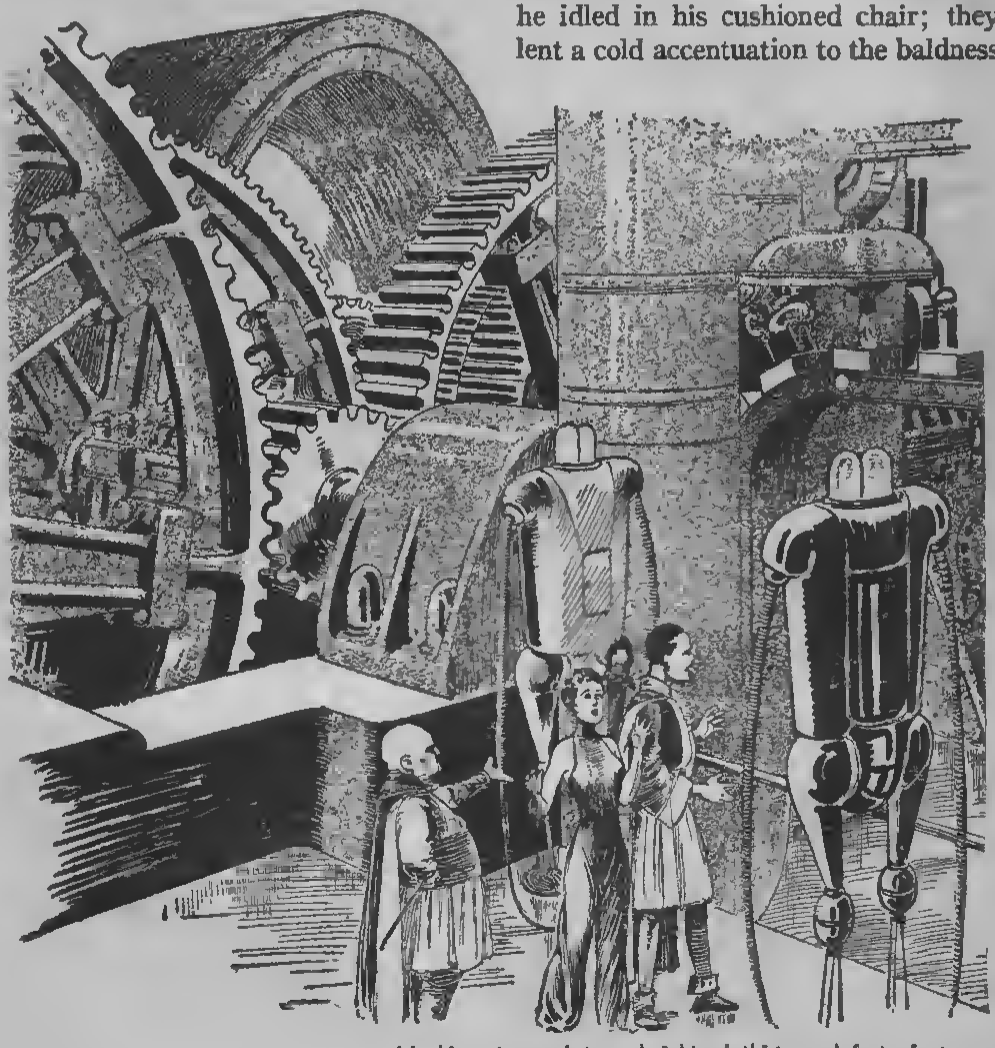
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CHAPTER I

In the Crystal Room

HANNIBAL FAIRCHILD SPRATT the Seventh, the sole surviving heir of the great Spratt-Fairchild dynasty and the ruler of all Tranerica (formerly America), sat in the Crystal Room of his castle above the Hudson. Through the clear glittering walls of a dome-shaped chamber that arched two hundred feet above him, the winter sun shone in remote, chilly splendor. The rays, filtering in as through a layer of ice, gave a bluish, rather ghostly complexion to Spratt as he idled in his cushioned chair; they lent a cold accentuation to the baldness

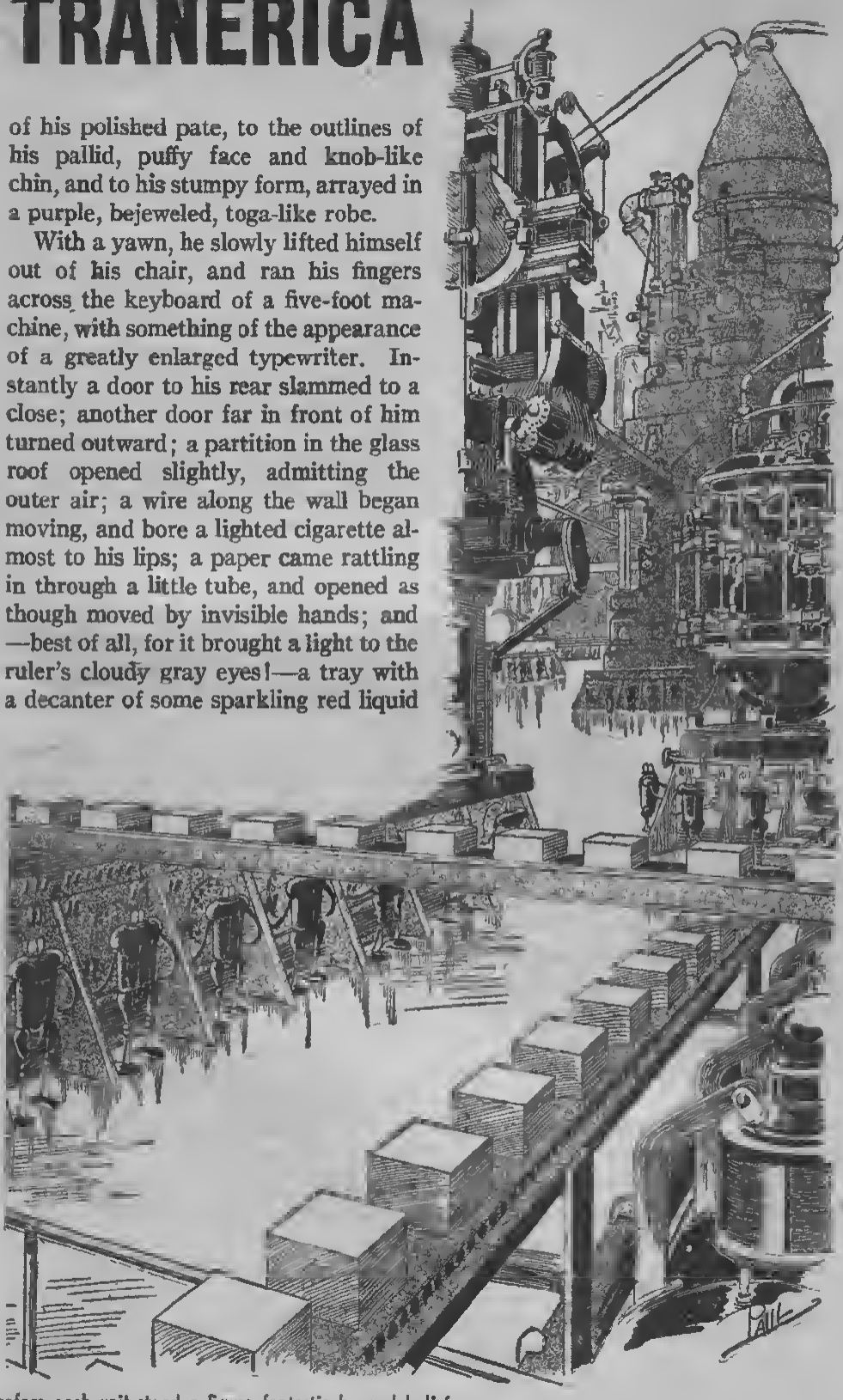


Machines towered to a height of thirty and forty feet—and

TRANERICA

of his polished pate, to the outlines of his pallid, puffy face and knob-like chin, and to his stumpy form, arrayed in a purple, bejeweled, toga-like robe.

With a yawn, he slowly lifted himself out of his chair, and ran his fingers across the keyboard of a five-foot machine, with something of the appearance of a greatly enlarged typewriter. Instantly a door to his rear slammed to a close; another door far in front of him turned outward; a partition in the glass roof opened slightly, admitting the outer air; a wire along the wall began moving, and bore a lighted cigarette almost to his lips; a paper came rattling in through a little tube, and opened as though moved by invisible hands; and —best of all, for it brought a light to the ruler's cloudy gray eyes!—a tray with a decanter of some sparkling red liquid



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glided in along two little rails placed just above the floor.

As Spratt sipped the beverage, he chanced to let his gaze rest on a large printed sheet that cut off the light on a segment of the glass wall a few yards away. "By the blue lightnings," he muttered, "it's time to turn a new leaf!" And he pressed another key on the typewriter-like instrument; and a lever reached out automatically, and tore off the printed sheet. "December 31, 2438," it had read. But in its place appeared a paper with the notation, "January 1, 2439."

Having finished his drink, Spratt thrust the cigarette between his lips, and strolled listlessly across the room. He stared out through the wall—which, being entirely of glass, was like one great continuous window—and saw the river glistening fifteen hundred feet below. Bordering the water on both shores and reaching into the distance as far as his somewhat dim sight could follow, he saw the gigantic black bulks of the "Hives"—those enormous buildings which, each a quarter of a mile high and rectangular, triangular or hexagonal in shape, had existed ever since the Iron Renaissance of the twenty-second century. The eyes of the ruler, as he glanced out at those huge familiar structures, scarcely noted how closely they were packed together, windowless and forbidding; or how, in the narrow aisles between them, a darkness as of midnight reigned, except when now and then a light flashed and went out in their vague depths, like the signal lamp of some soul astray in Purgatory.

SPRATT yawned once more, and looked bored; a sigh came from between his heavy lips. "This business of being a dictator isn't what it used to be," he reflected, gloomily. "Everything runs so smoothly, there's nothing left for me to do. Why, there hasn't even been a revolt for seventy-five years. They say that dear old great-granddad, Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Fourth, had a cracking good time putting down the insurrection of the Mill Robots. But that was way back in 2362. Then his father, Hanniabl Fairchild Spratt the Third, had to liquidate ten thousand conspirators who were plotting against his life. That was more than a hundred years ago. And, before that time, the first two members of their dynasty had to keep things humming to cut down their enemies and stay on their thrones. But look at me! Nothing to do but press buttons all day. No one would even think of questioning my authority. I don't have to issue commands; I'm obeyed automatically. And, all the while, I'm so weary of the whole thing I often think of taking one long jump into the Hudson and ending it all."

Dismally the sovereign glanced down at the waters, still glittering in the noonday sun despite the shadowing towers that arose on all sides. Then irresolutely he ambled away; turned a switch; entered a little plush-lined car that rolled in through a door which opened as if of its own volition; pulled a second switch; and went gliding away through long steel-lined corridors. As he shot rapidly forward, doors opened before him and closed behind him with perfectly timed regularity, although no human operator was visible; lights gleamed and vanished; the car turned curves and descended grades although the rider did nothing to guide it; and finally it came to a halt in an immense room marked "Science Laboratory."

Well, might as well go on with my experiments," Spratt reflected. For he had one great secret vice; frequently, when bored with everything else in life, he would find amusement and relaxation in his scientific investigations. Just now he was on the trail of a discovery which,

he thought, would startle even a century that had all but lost the capacity for enthusiasm.

The moment he entered the laboratory, be was a transformed man. Witb something of an inventor's natural pride, he glanced at the great machine that towered above him, with coils as of monstrous exposed entrails, and projecting pipes as of factory smokestacks and tall dials, and wires and wheels intricately interwoven, and a dark buzzing something in his beart, whicb might have reminded one of a dynamo purring. Certainly, the machine was unlike anything else which existed even in the mechanical twenty-fifth century; and Spratt, as be stared up at it, forgot that he was the head and ruler of all Tranerica, forgot all the monotony and ennui of a dictator's life, forget everything except that he was on the road to a great scientific discovery.

"OUR age has made marvelous progress in its command of invisible rays," he meditated, as he plunged a corkscrew-like steel device down a long tube and caused a sbeet of red ligbtning to flash across the room. "We have solved the problem of the distant control of moving cars, doors, elevators, aircraft and the like. But in one respect we've never gone very far. For the last five centuries, our knowledge of the fourth dimension has been confined mostly to theory. Except, of course," he added, with a chuckle of sly satisfaction as a wave of blue flame crackled in front of him, "for my machine!"

"It's not perfect yet," be went on, while his hands deftly manipulated a lever, "but it takes advantage of a new principle. It's evident that the rays of tbe fourth dimension must impinge on those of the third, since all the universe is really one. At the point where they impinge, it may be possible to pass from one dimension to the other. This means we may be able to shift to another position in time, since time, as has been brought out centuries ago, is the fourth dimension of space. Or, on the other hand, we may bring objects out of some otber place in time into the year 2438 —no, 2439. Well, isn't that what I've really done already?"

While his fingers still pulled at the levers of the machine, Spratt glanced behind him to a great glass case, where a curious assortment of bric-a-brac had been accumulated. There was a fragment of an old, mouldy, broken vase, bearing an Etruscan inscription; a desiccated seven-foot bone, wbich might bave belonged to a dinosaur; a Medieval steel helmet, badly eaten by rust; the shattered half of what looked a little like a bronze Buddha; and—the prize and crown of the collection!—an electric ligbt bulb which may have dated back as far as the mid-twentieth century, its fractured antique filament still distinctly visible in the glass interior.

"With such objects already gathered from the past, by causing it to merge with our own dimension," reflected Spratt, permitting himself an inventor's natural pride, "there is no telling where we may not end. Yes! I may yet be known to the world as sometbing more worth-while than a dictator!"

Long and lovingly he peered at the curios in his glass case—so long and lovingly, in fact, that he may have become a trifle careless. His fingers moved almost automatically among a great array of switches and levers, as numerous as the keys on a piano; and his eyes did not closely follow what his bands were doing. Accordingly, he may have pulled the wrong rod—at least, this is bow be afterwards explained tbe matter to himself—with the result that Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Seventh received the greatest shock that had

come to him in all his forty-nine years on earth.

All at once the room seemed deluged in a flood of leaping hlue fire. There came a detonation as of exploding dynamite; the upper portions of the dimension-machine flew apart, and crashed against the ceiling as if shot out of a trench mortar; the walls shook, the floor heaved like the deck of a vessel pitching at sea; and green and purple lights succeeded the hlue in the split fraction of a second. Then there came the sound of heavy ohjects thudding; and finally, while a rain of dehris showered to all parts of the room, a cry as of some being in agony came from the depths of the shattered machine; and then hy degrees all grew still.

STUNNED hy the concussion, Spratt picked himself up from a corner of the room, into which he had heen providentially hurled. A fragment of flying steel as long as his arm had missed his head hy less than the width of his small finger, yet he had not entirely escaped injury. His neatly shaven lower lip was bleeding; there was a blue gash beneath his left eye; the sleeves of his toga were torn, and the gown was streaked and speckled with machine oil; moreover, his shin was hruised so painfully that he groaned. Nevertheless, Spratt felt fortunate as he arose to his feet; for he knew that he escaped destruction by a hair's hreadth.

"By the white fires!" he tought, as he gloomily surveyed the dimension-machine, which now was little more than a twisted mass of wreckage. "This ends my experiments with super-space! Ah, well! I suppose I'll have to resign myself. I'll never be anything more for the rest of my life than dictator of half the world!"

Mournfully he continued his ruminations, as he mopped a perspiring brow. "Mighty lucky I took the precaution of making the lahoratory sound-proof. Otherwise, the explosion would have been heard, and then wouldn't I he the laughing stock of two continents! Not openly, of course," he rambled on, "for people still value their lives!"

He took a step forward to examine the ruins; and, as he did so, he received a shock only slightly less than that of the explosion. A low moan came to his ears; and something stirred slightly amid the dehris. Then, while he paused thunderstricken, he heard a second moan from a different direction; and something else moved amid the wreckage.

Spratt's first impulse was to flee. Had he not been a son of the matter-of-fact twenty-fifth century, which had long ceased to believe in ghosts, hauntings, and other such unscientific nonsense, he might even have heen filled with superstitious terror. Nothing was more certain than he had been alone in the room only a minute before —whence, therefore, the moans and the mysterious movements? The situation was one to daunt even a hraver man than Spratt; hence it is no wonder if he tremhled a little and felt his scalp prickling; while old ancestral fears, reviving from the childhood of the race, leapt up in his heart, and turned his knees to water.

Within a second or two, the moans were repeated—and from two separate directions! And Spratt, as he hacked up slightly, with a wildly hammering heart, thought of the secret hutton near the door, which he need only press in order to send a score of mechanical policemen clattering to his aid.

But before he could get within yards of the hutton, something occurred which held him riveted to one spot and caused his eyes almost to pop out of his head. He heard still another moan, followed hy a much more vigorous stirring amid the ruined machinery; then

something pushed itself up out of the confusion of wires, wheels and rods, and, with a prodigious heaving movement, threw the obstructions out of its way, and staggered to its feet.

Stricken speechless, Spratt stood face to face—with another man! And what a man! More than six feet tall and with shoulders like a hullock's, he tossed a mane of touseled red hair and stared about him in a dazed way through wide blue eyes. He was beardless, but wore a moustache—as no man had done for centuries! And his clothes—they were like articles straight from a museum! He wore tight-fitting dark trousers, surmounted by an equally tight-fitting dark jacket—in the absurd ancient style! Around his neck he wore a colored rope! His feet were hidden in shining black cases instead of being displayed in sandals! Even had his garments not been rumpled and soiled he could have shone in a masquerade without further make-up!

AFTER glancing about him for a moment as if stunned, the stranger let a startled exclamation come to his lips. "Where am I? And you—who are you?"

Spratt noted what a strange enunciation the man had. It was clear that he was speaking English, and yet it was hard, very hard, to make out what he was saying.

"I—I don't know what happened to me," continued the newcomer, rubbing his hand across his forehead, as if to wipe away the mists. "We—we were up there together on the hilltop—and suddenly everything went blank." And then, as recollection came flashing back, he cried out sharply, almost furiously, "She! Tell me—where is *she?*"

But before Spratt had had time to answer—indeed, before he had quite made out the meaning of these words—the stranger's attention was caught by another groan from amid the tangles of broken machinery. And he wheeled about, and frantically began working amid the wreckage, which he swept aside with swift and powerful strokes. "Celia!" he cried, in tones of tenderness and alarm. "Celia, dearest! Are you hurt? Are you hurt?"

"No, not much, darling, not much," came the reply, in a softer voice; and, a moment later, another figure stood at his side.

"By the red furies, can it be that fairies are real?" thought Spratt, as, with a gasp, he gazed at the second stranger—a slender, fragile figure all clad in shimmery white, with flowing hair of such a rich golden and delicate features with such an innocent, pansy-like grace that for a moment the dictator wondered whether he were not subject to hallucinations, and were not beholding an apparition rather than a breathing woman.

CHAPTER II

Unexpecten Visitors

FOR a long, silent minute Spratt stood staring at the two strangers in a fascinated surprise equalled only by the astonishment with which they stared back at him. But gradually, as the hazes cleared from his mind, the inventor realized what had happened. The dimension machine had snatched these beings out of another century! By accident, they had been at the point where the dimensions merged, and had been hurled into the twenty-fifth century from some remote age. It was evident that they were very ancient, not only from the cut of their clothes, but from—

Spratt's reveries were interrupted by the voice of the girl—a full-throated,

richly musical voice such as he did not remember ever having heard before.

"Where—where are we? What—what has happened?" she ejaculated, still somewhat dazed, as she leaned against the man for support.

"Never mind, sweetheart, it will be all right," he soothed, bending over her solicitously. "It all seems like some bad practical joke, doesn't it?"

Spratt, although he made every effort, could not quite catch the meaning of these words; but he realized that it was about time for him to say something. Accordingly, he stepped forward, with a gracious sweep of his left arm, following the best twenty-fifth century standards of etiquette; and he addressed the young lady by the name he had heard the man employ.

"You are very welcome, sweetheart," he began, with what he thought to be extraordinary politeness from one in his high position. But he stopped short very suddenly, feeling that he had erred somehow; he did not like the quiver of revulsion that passed through the girl's frame, nor the icy glitter that came into the man's eyes.

"I do not know who you may be," declared the latter, taking a pugnacious forward stride, "but you assume strange liberties on short acquaintance!"

"Would you mind repeating that?" requested the dictator, mildly. "You pronounce English with such a quaint accent, I'm afraid I didn't catch one word."

The stranger's reply was a burst of mocking laughter. "Quaint accent? Why, you ought to hear yourself! You've got the damnedest foreign twist to your tongue I ever heard. Any one would know you hadn't been in the country a year!"

"I've been here all my life, sir!" snorted Spratt, indignantly, when he had caught the gist of the latter remark.

"I suppose you've been wearing that circus costume, too, all your life?" sneered the stranger, with a gesture toward Spratt's bejeweled purple toga, now smeared and spattered with machine oil. "Don't you think it's time to cut out the comedy? What in hell's name did you do to us anyway? Knock us cold, then kidnap us?"

"Knock you cold? Kidnap you? Circus costume?" repeated the dictator, with a puzzled expression. "I do not know those words. They have a very queer antique sound. If you will excuse me, I shall investigate."

While his visitors looked on with wide, gaping eyes he pressed a lettered button that stood with hundreds of others on a dial at one end of the room. A few seconds passed in silence; then a panel on the wall rattled open, and a huge volume slid in through a pneumatic tube and arranged itself neatly on a table.

"THIS dictionary isn't exactly up-to-the-minute," remarked Spratt, as he thumbed through the thousands of pages. "It dates back to the late twenty-four twenties. . . . Ah, here we are! 'Kidnap. Obsolete. To steal bodily. Refers to a barbarous practice of the Ages of Confusion, no case of which has been known for over three hundred years.'

"So that's what you accuse me of?" he rushed on, looking up and glaring at the man. "Resorting to a barbarous practice of the Ages of Confusion, in order to steal you bodily? Do you give me no credit at all for intelligence?"

"Say, you must be daft!" muttered the man. "I'm not interested in your crazy remarks! All I want to know is when you're going to release me, and this young lady, Celia—Miss Stanwick."

"Stanwhat?" repeated Spratt. "Stanwick? What a horrible name! It grates on the tongue like sand! What

did you say you wanted me to do?"

"Release us! Set us free! Let us go!" repeated the stranger, with a shout.

"Oh, yes, I see," replied the dictator. "I'm sorry, but it's impossible. The machine is broken, and I couldn't get you back to your own century even if I wanted to."

"Our own century?" echoed the man and the girl, staring at one another in bewilderment.

"That's what I said," reiterated Spratt. "I can tell from your clothes, and also from your speech, that you come from somewhere in the Ages of Confusion. Maybe even as far back as the year 2000."

The newcomers stood regarding Spratt in a quizzical silence, as if not knowing whether he were jesting or a lunatic.

"By the way, just what year was it before your change of dimension?" he inquired.

"You know damn well it's 1938!" came the man's growled reply.

"1938? Well, well, well, isn't that interesting? Why, that's much further back than I'd dare to hope! Before the first flush of the Mental Revival! Now I know why your speech and manners are so uncouth. Of course, you're not to be blamed for the backwardness of your age. I congratulate you—congratulate both of you on escaping from the Dark Generations into an eilightened century!"

"Say, I can't make out half of what you're saying, but you ought to go on the stage, you say it so well!" growled the man.

"He'd look wonderful in the movies, wouldn't he," tittered the girl.

"I consider it a piece of rare luck to have met you," continued Spratt, who had not caught the drift of the last remarks. "I've always wondered how it was possible for any one to live at all in the Dark Generations—and now to have first-hand information!—why, it's worth half my empire. Consider yourselves my guests, both of you, so long as you remain in Tranerica—which, I trust, will be for life. You particularly," he concluded, with an ogling smile at Celia, who frowned in reply and averted her fair head.

While Spratt was making this speech, the red-haired man had sidled over to the table, on which lay the dictionary, whose heavy golden cover gave it an unusual appearance. With a gasp, he turned the leaves, struck by the typography, which was of a style wholly new to him; then, upon glancing at the title page, he let out a little cry of astonishment.

"I'll be damned!" he exclaimed, under his breath. And then, in louder tones, "I'll be damned a thousand times!" And finally, at the top of his voice, "Come, quick, Celia! See! Just see!"

THE girl flitted to his side, and her eyes also widened with amazement as she glanced at the lines he eagerly pointed out: Printed for His Honor Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Seventh. Hudson Highlands. A. D. 2429."

Yet there was an incredulous smile on her face as she turned toward her companion. "Sounds so matter-of-fact you'd almost think it was real, wouldn't you?" she commented, with a little laugh.

"Yes, it's carrying a practical joke a good deal further than you'd expect," he acknowledged, also with an unbelieving smile. "What I want to know is, who in thunder is Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Seventh?"

This was the dictator's cue. Coming forward with a broad grin on his baggy face, he bowed and made another wide flourish with his left hand, then declared, "My dear friends from the twen-

tieth century, the man you refer to is none other than myself. Since you would, in the natural course of things —b'm—have died nearly five hundred years ago, you couldn't be expected to recognize me. But you see before you the Tyngall of Tranerica!"

Having made this announcement, the speaker stood erect and impressive, with a proud light in his glance, as if expecting his hearers to fall down on their knees before him.

But, to his surprise, they did not seem overwhelmed; on the contrary, amused sparkles played in their eyes.

"The what, did you say?" demanded the red-haired stranger, a little in the manner of one humoring a child.

"The Tyngall of Tranerica!" repeated Spratt, imposingly. "Tyngall of Tranerica!"

"Afraid I don't get you," stated the stranger.

The girl, meanwhile, had turned her back, and was struggling hard to restrain her laughter.

"Well, I've said it as plainly as I know how," returned Spratt, dejectedly. And then, as if a burst of light had come over him, he exclaimed, "Of course! Oh of course! I should have known! In your day, Tranerica wasn't called Tranerica at all. It wasn't until the twenty-second century that the term came into use, a corruption of the old Trans-America. So let me explain again, my friends. What you see before you is the Tyngall of Trans-America."

The strangers still looked blank. "What's a Tyngall?" they inquired.

"Oh, by the spitting lightnings, don't you know that, either? But naturally not, naturally not," he continued, in the manner of one suddenly recollecting something. "The word was only introduced by my renowned forebear, Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the First, commonly known as the Great. It was a name he took in place of the plebeian designation of king, dictator, or emperor. It means ruler of the world."

THE two visitors were exchanging significant glances, in which amusement alternated with a faint pity. "Poor fellow! He's nuts!" the man whispered to the girl; and she nodded back expressively.

"Poor fellow! Nuts! I do not know what those expressions mean!" reflected Spratt whose keen ears had caught the words. "I will remember to look them up in the dictionary." And then, in majestic tones, "You people do not seem pleased to have the honor of speaking to the Tyngall!"

"Oh, we—we are overcome, Your Highness!" declared the red-haired one, bowing to the floor with a gesture of mock courtesy.

"Will your Eminence accept our profoundest obeisance!" exclaimed the girl, also bowing; but she was unable to keep back the giggles that struggled to her throat.

"Was every one in the twentieth century like you?" thundered the Tyngall, scowling in high displeasure. "Was it your custom to make mock of solemn things? Do you not realize that if any one else in all Tranerica spoke to me in such a fashion, I would touch a button that would send a death-bolt shivering through his body? From the barrens of the Yukon to the plains of Patagonia, and from the waters of the Atlantic to those of the Pacific, I am absolute lord and master—I alone, the undisputed Tyngall!—and there is none who would dare to anger me!"

These words were spoken with an assurance, an air of self-importance that could not but sober the hearers a little. The laughter died from the girl's lips; the man's attitude became rigid and controlled. Though neither of them doubted that they were face to face

with a lunatic, they also realized that he might prove dangerous if goaded too far.

"I see that you question my assertions," continued Spratt, still with a frown. "You would not only challenge my integrity; you would deny the evidence of your own senses. They say you ancients were a stuhhorn crowd, who wouldn't believe much of anything, except a lot of gihberish accepted on faith. But I never suspected how stupid you could be. However, if what you want is more proof, you shall have it!"

Even as he spoke, he pulled a lever, and a panel on the wall rattled open, revealing a glass partition facing the river. Below them, for endless distances, the huge hlack bulks of the "Hives" towered on both sides of the stream.

"Look!" commanded the dictator. "Then tell me if you had anything like that in the twentieth century!"

The man and girl hastened to do as directed. At the first glimpse, they reeled a little, like persons who have been struck a hlow; they gasped, and let out low startled exclamations; and the girl staggered against the man for support.

"Harry! Harry darling!" she cried, in a half fainting condition. "Is it real? Or am I dreaming?"

For several long silent seconds Harry continued staring at those colossal hlack structures that lined the river. Then slowly he declared, "I guess we're both dreaming."

"No, no, we're not!" she wailed reviving and springing out of his arms as realization came upon her. "It's true!

It's true! We—we've gone to another age! We'll never—never see our own world again!"

"Well, what of it, dearest?" he soothed, passing one hand consolingly over her glistening golden hair. "I still can't believe it's not some sort of trick. But even if it isn't, we've still got one another, haven't we? I suppose we can marry just as easily in the twenty-fifth century as in the twentieth?"

"Not unless I give permission!" put in the Tyngall, glaring ominously at the speaker.

"THINK, dearest, we hadn't much except each other, had we?" continued Harry. "My joh as an airplane mechanic—don't you suppose I could get something just as good in another age? Tell the truth, in some ways I'd be tickled. Think how neatly we'd be rid of all our pestering relations."

"Well, that's so," she admitted, looking up at him with an attempt to be hrave; hut her smile came through her tears. "Still, it's hard to think that father — poor father! — must have passed away centuries ago, and we couldn't even be there to say a last prayer for him."

"He looked pretty healthy to me last week—or five hundred years ago, whenever it was—when he ordered me out of the house, so as to hitch you up with that swilling banker's son. My God, Celia! when I think of that, it seems to me the luckiest thing that could have happened to us both was to get clean out of the century!"

"Well, that *is* one way of looking at it," she acknowledged, smiling and weeping all at once; and his arms gathered her into a close embrace.

"Come, come!" interrupted the dictator, impatiently. "I can't bear such maudlin sentimentality. You ancients are hard to understand. I should imagine that, having found yourself in another century, you'd have something else to think of than throwing your arms around one another and cooing like two habes!"

Stung hy the contempt in Spratt's tones, the two strangers separated and looked up.

"Love-making in public is considered immoral nowadays!" continued Spratt, severely. "However, being only two ignoramuses from the twentieth century, you couldn't be expected to know that. So I'll pardon you this time. But don't let it happen again. It's more than modern sensibilities can stand."

The man and girl said nothing, but still glanced at Spratt as if doubtful of his sanity.

"Now let's get down to something important," he went on, hastily. "The question is, what am I to do with you? Well, I'll decide in due time. First of all, it may be interesting to show you something of the modern world. It will be edifying to see your reactions. Besides, it may help me to break the monotony of life. So if you'll come this way, we'll begin our preparations."

Still without a word, the two visitors followed. But it was coming to them more and more clearly that in some mysterious way, they were subject to the whim and command of this individual with the purple toga and the outlandish manners and speech.

CHAPTER III

A Realm of Wizardry

IT seemed to both strangers that they had entered some fairy-book realm, where a wizard with his magical wand brought wonders to pass. For the Tyngall merely lifted a small steel rod, and waved it as might a musical conductor directing an invisible orchestra; and instantly a partition in the floor opened and three little cushioned cars shot out, each moving on a pair of broad-based wheels arranged bicycle-fashion. Two of the cars glided up to Harry and Celia as if under intelligent direction; and after they had entered, one in each car, the vehicles darted away again, and whirled them through long lighted tunnels at what seemed breakneck speed.

It was only a minute later when they halted in a room filled with long shimmery rows of blue, green and crimson cloths, which hung from hooks on a ceiling fifteen feet above. "This is the dressery," stated the Tyngall, who had followed close behind. "Naturally, if we are going to show you around, we'll have to array you in respectable clothes."

"Respectable?" echoed both strangers, in one breath.

"Of course. You hardly call those rags presentable, do you?" he demanded, pointing to the visitors' fantastic twentieth century apparel. "I suppose it did all right in your own day, when you didn't know any better—but the world has advanced, my friends, the world has advanced!"

"You don't expect me to put on a stage costume like yours?" demanded Harry.

"Stage costume? Stage? You ancients did have the most curious idioms! I merely wish you to dress sensibly and decently. And, of course, you'll have to remove your red hair."

"What?" bawled Harry, with a displeased glance at the dictator's glistening pate. "You mean, cut it off?"

"Not necessarily. It will suffice to dye it black."

"I'll be damned if I will!"

"You'll be damned if you don't. Do you not understand, sir, we haven't had a case of red-headedness in this country for two hundred years."

"You talk as if it were something like diphtheria or scarlet fever!"

"Well, in a way it is," asserted the Tyngall, with a yawn. "You see, a few centuries ago the racial purists got control of the government. They happened to be black-headed, and proved that

black-heads possess all the bigbest spiritual, intellectual and moral qualities. Lower in the scale were the brown-heads, but the lowest of all were the red-heads. This was demonstrated with statistics, compiled hy black-beaded statisticians. Hence the drive on the reds began. They were herded out of the country; jailed, stoned and hurned; their property was confiscated, and their propagation was prohibited. In due time, consequently, their hreed disappeared. The movement was called by various names, such as the survival of the fittest and saving Tranerica for democracy—thougb sometimes, to tell the truth, I've had my douhts. But the old prejudice persists, and today it would be as much as any man's life was worth to appear in puhlic with red hair."

THE Tyngall heaved a long sigh, which was met with answering sighs from the girl and Harry. "Well, in that case," decided the latter, after a silence, "I suppose there's nothing to be done hut dye my hair."

"Good! You show remarkahle sense, for an ancient!" approved Spratt, beaming. And then, turning to tbe girl, be suggested, "and now, if you will pass that door to your left, sweetheart—no, no, I forgot, that's not your name, is it?—anyhow, you will find a dressing room, with a mechanical maid to belp you."

"Mechanical maid?" repeated Celia, wondering if sbe had heard correctly.

"Of course . . . Didn't you have mechanical maids in your century? . . . Well, well, well, just imagine! How did you women ever manage? Just go in there, sweet—I mean, young lady, and you will find out everything."

After the girl had left and the door had automatically closed behind ber, Spratt pulled a little crank on the wall, and a long metal box at one end of the room clattered open. Out of this case tbere stalked what, at the first startled glimpse, Harry took to be a man—a man eigbt feet tall, and with long swinging limbs. A second glimpse, however, showed him that the being had no face other than two small gleaming electric orbs which served in place of eyes. Its arms and legs, as it came clankIng across the room, were seen to be of iron; its trunk, heneath the gray toga wbich it wore, was obviously of the same substance; its head bristled with electric batteries instead of hair; a coil of wires reached out from hehind it, and there was a continuous buzzing from somewhere in its heart.

"Didn't you have electrical valets either, in your day?" inquired Spratt, with a pitying expression, as the iron monster approached at a steady stride.

"No, thank goodness!" declared Harry, retreating slightly, although he strove his best to hold his ground.

But he watched in fascinated interest as the automaton halted just in front of Spratt, reached one long arm upward, plucked a violet toga from a hook near the ceiling, spread it out before the Tyngall, and deftly folded and removed the oil-smeared rohe whicb Spratt doffed. The great seven-fingered hands of the machine, moreover, smoothed out and dusted the dictator's new clothes after he had donned them; then, as if under intelligent guidance, turned to Harry and prepared to perform a similar service for him.

"You see, the principle is simple," explained Spratt, as he noted the dumhfounded amazement on his visitor's face. "It works by radio control. Electrical impulses, which I discharge through the air by pressing a button or moving a switch or rod, are transmitted to very sensitive receiving bulhs within tbe valet; and then, by means of amplifiers—"

But it is questionable whether Harry heard much of this speech. He was

too much occupied with the process of changing clothes; and was both amused and embarrassed to see himself presented with an embroidered saffron-colored toga, with hillowy sleeves and sea-green decorations. "By heaven," he muttered, as he struggled to adjust the new garb, "it's lucky my friends are dead five centuries, and can't see me now!"

HE had hardly completed his dressing when the dictator, by turning a screw, caused the door to their left to open, and Celia emerged, arrayed in hlack pantaloons like those of Chinese women, and with an open-necked undecorated hlack jacket.

"Good Lord, don't I look atrocious?" she exclaimed, hlushing. "Is this how all women nowadays are dressed?"

"Naturally," returned the Tyngall, in slightly offended tones. "You can't expect them to wear gaudy clothes like us men, can you? Since nature gave them so many graces and charms, what need have they of rich garments to enhance their beauty? It isn't as with us poor males, who need every bright color to conceal our natural drahness."

"You look good to me, Celia, in any clothes," Harry sought to console her.

"And you—why, good gracious, Harry, you look like a one-man vaudeville show!" cried the girl, with a sudden hurst of laughter, as she caught her first full view of her lover.

"One-man vaudeville show? Vaudeville show?" repeated Spratt. "That's something else I'll have to make a note of. I wonder whether it's in the dictionary." And then, looking up with a sudden new hriskness of manner, "Well, now that we're all nicely dressed, let's start on our little journey!"

Before they set out, however, Spratt remembered to procure a bottle of some inky suhstance, which was ruhbed on Harry's hair by the mechanical valet and changed it to the color of tar. "Ah, now you look almost modern!" exclaimed the Tyngall, approvingly, as he stood back a few feet to examine his metamorphosed visitor. "It's clear, after all, that red-headedness is only skin deep!"

"Now we'll clip off those hairs from your face," continued Spratt, indicating Harry's moustache. "The ancients had a name for it, I can't remember what. No man nowadays would dream of growing such a brush under his nose."

It was useless for the victim to protest. The electrical valet produced a pair of shears, and set to work; and Harry thought it wise not to resist too strenuously, lest some accidental motion cause half of his lip to he forfeited.

"Heavens, dearest, if I didn't know it was you now, I'd never believe it!" commented Celia, ruefully, as she surveyed her transformed lover.

"A great improvement, I'm sure!" contributed the Tyngall. "And now let's see, just where shall I take you first? Perhaps to the Mills. In that case, we will need some special ear protectors."

He pressed a hutton, and three black instruments looking like ear-phones slid in through a pneumatic tube. "Put these over your ears, friends," he instructed. "Otherwise, the din would deafen you."

The others did as directed, and then seated themselves again in the little cushioned cars. Away they rushed, so rapidly that the wind whistled hy them; along twisting, vaguely lighted corridors; down abrupt descents; then up steep grades, and down once more. They had no idea where they were going, and were relieved when at last the cars halted and they found themselves before a huge steel door in a shadowy room reminding them of a railroad waiting station.

NO sooner had the Tyngall joined them than the steel door groaned and opened—and all at once they realized why they had had to wear the ear protectors. Even through the muffling fahrics, they could hear an uproar like that of several hoiler works comhined —a continuous pounding, hammering, stamping, clanging noise as of countless great iron masses in violent contact. They found themselves stepping into an enormous hall—a hall several hundred yards long and almost equally wide. Its ceiling, supported hy scores of branching steel pillars, rose to a height of three hundred feet; its windowless walls were featured hy clusters of white lights so hright that the spectators had to hlink and shield their eyes; while a fine dust arose everywhere, irritating the throat and nostrils.

All along the floor of this colossal hall, in dozens of mathematically even rows, were machines that towered to a height of thirty or forty feet, with an intricacy of clattering spindles, thumping rods, whirring wheels, and rotating chains. And before each machine there stood a figure that would have seemed fantastic beyond helief had the ohservers not already known of the mechanical maid and valet. Fifteen feet in height, with iron limbs and hody, each of these figures was exactly like every other; each was made in the image of a man, except that its hands were nine-fingered, that it had three electric lights where the face should have been, and that wires ran in and out of its legs and head. And each, standing stiff and erect, was operating with clock-like regularity. First its hands would shoot up, moving the levers of the machine hefore it; then down with a crash the hands would come, then, after a second's rest, they would rise again, in precisely the same movements as before; and the motions of all the machines were so perfectly synchronized that one was reminded of a well trained military company executing drill maneuvers.

For a minute the strangers looked on, appalled and fascinated; then Spratt motioned them away. And after the steel gate had closed behind them and they were hack in a place of relative quiet, he removed his ear protectors, and declared, "It isn't good to remain too long—very damaging to the ears and nervous system."

"What under heaven is it?" asked Harry, awe-stricken.

"Why, the Mills, of course," replied the dictator, in the manner of one explaining to a stupid child.

"But where are the men?"

"What would men be doing in that Inferno? Do you think we are so hackward as to let human beings work in the Mills?"

Harry and Celia hoth stared and looked hlank.

"Why, ever since the Humanitarian Reform of the last century, we've had machines to run our machines. We find mechanical lahorers as far superior to flesh-and-hlood laborers as motor cars are to the animals which used to pull your carts—what do you call them?—I've forgotten the name."

"Horses," prompted Harry.

"As far superior to living man as motor cars were to horses. Besides, they have other advantages. Mechanical laborers never grow tired; they never talk hack to the boss; they never strike for shorter hours or higher pay; they never shirk, or get drunk; they never form unions, or commit sahotage; they never have to be pensioned off in case of illness or old age; and their efficiency is never disturhed hy any psychological quirk. All in all, they constitute the perfect solution of the past lahor prohlem."

"But do you need no living men at all?"

"VERY few. The machines rarely break down. All we require is an occasional superintendent, and a small corps of experts who direct the mechanical workers by remote radio control. The Mills you have just seen are among the largest in Tranerica, but they're many others built on the same plan."

"What do they make in this one?" inquired Celia.

"Mechanical workers. Manufacturing mechanical workers is, in fact, one of our major industries."

"But that means that most human beings are thrown out of work," pointed out Harry. "The unemployment problem must be simply terrific."

"Terrific? What's that word?" demanded the Tyngall. "Oh, you mean, very bad? Well, to tell you the truth, it was quite troublesome before the Age of Readjustment. But my great-great granddad, Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Third, hit upon the ideal remedy. You'll learn all about that in due time, when we get to visiting the Hives. Meanwhile, don't you want to see a little more of the Mills?"

"Very gladly!" exclaimed the two strangers. And once more they entered the little cushioned cars, and went shooting away through corridors and tunnels.

CHAPTER IV

The Hivites

IF the visitors were astonished at their first glimpse of the Mills, they were to be sheerly bewildered by their later discoveries. They were taken to the Furnaces, where mechanical workers twenty feet tall wielded shovels as large as five-passenger automobiles, and cast tons of coal each minute into gigantic fires. They were brought to the Construction Room, where mechanical workers measured, riveted and carried huge steel beams and girders; they were introduced to the Warehouses, where automatic arms packed and assorted thousands of bales and crates with scientific exactness; they were given glimpses of electrical laborers that scrubbed floors and that painted walls, that plastered and that drove nails, that crawled to fix pipes and drains, that sat at workstools, and that adjusted the lights of the ceiling with their long slender arms.

Eventually the party stopped for refreshments at a little inn where the viands were brought to them by mechanical waiters, after being prepared in automatic ovens by mechanical cooks. Next they descended to a point far below ground level, where great vaulted caverns supported by concrete columns spread for miles. All along the ceiling and Pillars were clusters of brillant white lights, so dazzling that the visitors had to be provided with sunglasses; while endless rows of glass cases, separated by narrow aisles, were spread across the floors. Each of these cases was filled with water, which varied in depth from two or three inches to several feet; and in this water green things grew in crowded profusion, in an atmosphere as warm as a hothouse. The visitors were surprised to see ripening tomatoes, strawberries and canteloupes; while the enticing reds and yellows of apricots, plums and cherries greeted them from low, dense clusters of trees.

"You see here an example of scientific agriculture," stated the Tyngall. "Over a century ago we solved the chemical secret of sunlight, and hence are able to reproduce its properties in the white lights you see all about you, so stimulating the chlorophyll of the plants to form starch, sugar and cellulose out of water and carbon dioxide.

All agriculture nowadays is accomplished indoors, where we are not dependent on the weather."

"But your plants don't seem to have any soil—only water!" pointed out Harry.

"Naturally not. It has been known for centuries—in fact, I shouldn't be surprised if it was common knowledge even in your own day—that all that plants need for growth is water, with the proper chemicals in solution. We take care to supply these in sufficient quantities—and as a result production is rapid and continuous. I forget the exact figures—but I believe it has been proved that one acre under cultivation nowadays can produce as much as five hundred acres by the primitive methods."

While the Tyngall was speaking, the visitors' attention was attracted to a mechanical worker, equipped with particularly long slender arms, who came clanking down one of the aisles, plucking the ripe fruit from the trees and depositing it in a large open box fastened to his waist.

"You see, farm labor also is entirely mechanized," continued Spratt. "Even the cows are milked automatically. You have no idea how this simplifies things."

"WHAT I don't understand," remarked Harry, as he observed how efficiently the mechanical orchardist gathered the fruit, "is where the men and women are. Is your whole world inhabited by machines? Do you realize, Mr.—Mr. Spratt, I think it is—"

"Call me Tyngall Spratt and show proper respect!" roared the dictator. "I do not know what Mister means!"

"Tyngall Spratt," continued Harry, undaunted, "do you not realize that we haven't seen any living person except yourself? As far as we can judge, you might be the only man alive in the twenty-fifth century!"

"Well, you shall see, you shall see very soon," promised the Tyngall. "I do not know the exact figures the mechanical statisticians broke down at the last census, two years ago—but it is believed that the population of North Tranerica alone is not less than two billions. Shall I take you now to the Hives?"

Harry and Celia both nodded; and, accordingly, they left the basement farms in their little cushioned cars, and wove their way hundreds of feet upward by long winding ascents.

"I really must apologize for the Hives," Spratt warned them, before they set out on this new expedition. "They are not as ideal as we could wish, since they date back to the twenty-second century, and were originally built to house working families. But now that the Reign of Leisure has begun, we've had to adapt them as best we can—"

"Reign of Leisure?" questioned Celia.

"To be sure. Since the machines perform all our services, no man needs to work unless he wants to. In fact, there's no way for most men to work even if they do want to. They are regularly supplied with all necessities—and their days are one long golden opportunity."

"Opportunity for what?" questioned the skeptical Harry.

"Opportunity to develop their higher qualities. But you shall see. Come, let's go."

A few minutes later, having been whisked several miles away, they halted in what seemed to be an enormous dormitory. On each side of a corridor several hundred yards long, a succession of dozens of doors opened; and each door led to a room or a group of several rooms provided with steel furniture and illuminated by electric bulbs built into the walls. None of them, so far as the strangers could see, had a window open-

ing to the daylight.

"This is a typical floor in one of the Hives," explained the Tyngall. "Each Hive is a hundred and twenty stories high; and there are bundreds of Hives in Hudson Highlands alone. You have seen the compartments occupied by individual families—"

"Compartments? You mean, apartments," corrected Harry.

"No, I mean compartments. This word, modern authorities agree, is much more accurate of the two. But let's go on. I will now show you how tbe Hivites pass their time."

"Hivites?"

"Yes, the inhabitants of the Hives—in other words, the common people. The great masses, who would bave had to work for a living in a less fortunate age."

Both Harry and Celia, naturally, were eager for a glimpse of the Hivites. But their enthusiasm would have heen considerahly dampened could they have foreseen the adventure that lay in wait.

"I THINK we will go first to the Day Rooms," continued the Tyngall. "The chambers where the Hivites pass their daily fourteen or sixteen hours of leisure."

"Don't they ever go out of doors?" inquired Celia.

"Out of doors? Why should they?" returned Spratt, wrinkling his nostrils with a disgusted expression. "Why should any one go out of doors when modern improvements bave given us perfect heating, perfect lighting, and perfect air conditioning indoors? No, no, my friends, we don't take any chance of exposing ourselves to the cruel winds, or the blistering sun! That may all have been very well in ancient times, when people couldn't help themselves; but nowadays we are civilized!"

A few minutes later they stood in a high-ceilinged corridor before a series of enormous gates, each marked "DAY ROOMS" in blazing red letters. The Tyngall pressed a button, and one of the gates rattled open; while half a dozen mechanical guards, each ten feet tall, stalked out and surrounded the party.

"What I do not understand," remarked Harry, as they entered the Day Rooms in the midst of the guards, "is that sometimes I see you pressing a button or switch to move the mechanical workers, and at other times they seem to act by themselves, almost as if they had an independent power of thought."

"Yes, it does seem that way," admitted the Tyngall, "but they are always under human control. The workers in the Mills and farms, for example, are all guided by radio waves shot out by operators in a central station, who keep track of their movements hy television. In the same way, our guards now are under remote control. But I'm surprised you have to ask about such simple matters. In your own day, didn't you have robot airplanes that could be guided by radio? And weren't you able to set type bundreds of miles away by wire? What we have done is merely to make the natural advance upon such elementary beginnings."

There was much more than the Tyngall said in explanation; but neither Harry nor Celia heard him, for they were both absorbed in observing the Day Rooms.

They found themselves in a series of cavernous connecting halls, with wide vaulted ceilings supported by concrete columns. The whole had been laid out on the plan of a park; graveled walks wound among lawns and patches of shrubbery, and here and there were little ponds where water-lilies hlossomed and swans lifted their heads. But the green spaces, pleasing as they were to the eye, were largely hidden from view hy the swarms of people, who crowded

everywhere as thickly as on the central business street of a large city.

Upon Spratt's appearance, hundreds of them flung themselves on the ground, with cries of reverence and adoration, and shouted, in voices that sounded almost automatic, "Tyngall! Oh, Tyngall! Hail Tyngall!" Many, creeping like animals on all fours, would have come close to kiss the hem of the dictator's robe, had not the swinging arms of the mechanical guards kept them away. Many others, standing erect, gave a military salute; but all alike kept repeating the same cry, which dinned about them with maddening insistence, "Tyngall! Oh, Tyngall! Hail, Tyngall!"

The visitors noted that the men and children all wore bright-colored togas—purple and lavender, apple-green, sapphire-blue and ruby-red—while the women were all clad in unadorned brown, gray or black. None of the men were bearded, and most of them were bald, like the Tyngall; they were all milky pale of complexion, with a tendency to baggy eyes and heavy paunches; and many had long, drawn faces, with down-curling pessimistic lips that seemed most surprising in view of the boundless leisure they all enjoyed.

BUT how did they pass their leisure? The two strangers were fascinated to note the occupations of the Hivites. Here and there little groups, sprawled on the grass, were absorbed in shuffling minute colored patches of cardboard, and from time to time would break out in loud disputatious cries. Here and there little bands were playing with small balls, which they threw into the air and caught; and here and there parties of youths were engaged in racing contests, or in exhibitions of boxing and wrestling. But a much more popular recreation, apparently, was to lie under a bush and sip a colored beverage out of long-necked bottles—in fact, it seemed that fully a quarter of the Hivites were enjoying this sport constantly. And meanwhile fully another quarter were gathered about little clattering machines, shouting in high agitation as they dropped pebbles through tiny slots, and thrashing furiously and yelling like wild beasts when a red dial registered the results.

"What are they doing?" questioned Celia, wondering if she had not strayed by mistake into a lunatics' ward.

"Merely passing the time," replied the Tyngall. "You see, it's quite a problem with the Hivites, what to do with all their time. So they've invented this little game. They're gambling for pebbles."

"Pebbles? But what use are pebbles?"

"None at all. However, since we don't have any money nowadays, we've got to have something to keep the Hivites amused. Pebbles will do as well as anything."

At this instant their attention was distracted by a frenzied outburst, where two of the pebble-gamblers had fallen upon one another, and were pounding and slashing at each other's faces as if bent on murder. "Fraud! Cheat! Bandit!" they both screamed, in outraged voices. "He's robbed me! He's robbed me! Cheat! Ruffian! Brigand!" And they tore at one another until they were both bruised and bleeding and their togas were ripped to shreds; while the crowd stood about them eager and delighted, and goaded them on with taunts and yells.

"But what's it all about?" demanded Celia. "If they're only playing for pebbles—"

"The psychology of the Hivites is very peculiar," explained the Tyngall. "Having nothing more important to think about, they hoard their pebbles,

and consider them priceless. But let them fight it out! A little quarrel now and then helps them to break the monotony of life."

With a shrug, the dictator passed on; and pointed to a walled gray enclosure of about the size of a large house. "Do you want to go in?" he suggested. "That's the library."

The visitors entered, but found to their surprise that there was no other occupant, except one old man who was dozing at the end of a long table, with several great tomes lying open before him. The books, which lay stacked about them in innumerable shelves, were covered with deep layers of dust; the covers were all age-worn and cracked, and a smell of must and age pervaded the establishment.

"The Hivites, I'm afraid, don't care much about reading," declared the Tyngall. "They say the pace of modern life is too fast. They haven't sufficient leisure—"

"But I thought you said they had nothing but leisure!" gasped Celia.

"Yes—but not for reading. That requires concentration. Oh, by the way, over there is the case of ancient books. Dates way back to your own time. Maybe you'd like to glance at it?"

THE Tyngall strode over to a shelf where the dust was even deeper than elsewhere, and plucked out a volume at random. "Collected works of Bernard—Bernard what's that?—Shaw, I suppose it is," he deciphered, with difficulty. "Wonder who he could have been? I'll have to instruct the librarian to go over this place sometime, and clear out a lot of this worm-eaten trash."

Celia in turn pulled out a volume, glanced at it with a stare of surprise, then turned about to exclaim, "What do you think, Harry! Here's 'Gone with the Wind!'"

But her words died half uttered. Had Harry also gone with the wind? He was no longer at her side—in fact, he was nowhere in the library!

With fluttering heart she ran to the entrance, crying as she went, "Dearest, dearest, where are you? Where are you?" But the pandemonium of the throngs outside drowned the tones of her voice. When she reached the library door she saw only the dense crowds billowing about her, throwing their little balls and playing with their bits of colored cardboard. Harry had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed him!

CHAPTER V

The Tyngall Proposes

FOR a long, silent moment Celia stood staring into the heedless multitude. Then an excited cry came once more to her lips, "Harry, Harry, where are you?" Some of the passers-by looked up, a little curious, then returned to their games with shrugs and comical grimaces; while, at the same time, she felt a hand clutching at her shoulder.

Wheeling about with the happy thought that Harry had come back, she found herself gazing into the pouchy face and small gray questioning eyes of the Tyngall.

"What is it, my lady?" he inquired. "You act as if you have lost something."

"I have," she declared, gloomily. "I—I don't know where Harry is."

The Tyngall did not appear disturbed. "Well," he returned, with a smile, "we mustn't let little things annoy us. Really, I don't mind in the least, so long as I have you."

"But I'm afraid *I* mind considerably," she protested, not liking the way he beamed upon her, with a half pos-

sessive smile. "Come, let's look for him."

"What's the use?" objected Spratt. "It would be very hard to find him. "You see, we haven't numbered him yet."

"Numbered him?"

"Of course. All the Hivites have numbers: for example, AX 56765, or ZY 420421. That's how we keep track of them. When once a man has lost his nnmber, or hasn't a number at all, there is no system of tracing him among all the millions of Hivites."

Celia still stood gazing disconsolately out into the crowd, straining her eyes to catch a glimpse of a tall, familiar figure. At any other time she would have heen ahsorbed in what she saw: the women amusing themselves by regarding their own images long and steadily in full-length mirrors; the little machines in which the ladies put their faces, screaming with pain while the wrinkles were heing ironed out; the pairs of lovers strolling arm in arm, the youths and girls jesting and quarreling as they hustled past; and the gay parties singing and shouting. But all this meant nothing to her, for nowhere could she find any sign of the one she desired to see.

"Come, let's step inside, where we will he hy ourselves," said the Tyngall, taking Celia's arm and leading her hack into the library. There they found themselves entirely alone; for the drowsy old man, interrupted in his slumbers, had arisen with the grumhling complaint that "Even in the lihraries nowadays there's no privacy," and had stumbled off with a hook under his arm.

"I do hope Harry will find his way hack here soon!" exclaimed Celia, growing more alarmed moment by moment.

"Well, what if he doesn't?" inquired Spratt. "To tell the truth, young lady, that would suit me just as well. Yes, in fact, it would suit me a great deal better. It might have heen very bothersome for us to have him around."

"For *us?*" echoed the girl, peering at the Tyngall with a sudden sharp suspicion, as she backed into a gallery of books marked, *Medieval: Twenty-First Century.* "Then was it you—was it you who—?"

"No, no, not I, young lady!" interrupted the Tyngall, waving one hand in a gesture of denial. "By my mechanical boots! if I had schemed to get rid of him, I could have found an easier way!"

"BUT you will help me find him, won't you? Won't you?" begged the girl, looking up at him with eyes of clear hlue innocent appeal.

"If fate has seen fit to remove him," asked the Tyngall, sententiously, while he leaned against a time-worn shelf of the twenty-third century neo-classical poets, "then why should I refuse the gifts it proffers? I believe I shall enjoy your company very much hetter without him."

"Oh, you—you are horrihle!" accused the girl, retreating with tears in her eyes.

"Not at all, young lady. Merely human. Though I do live in the twenty-fifth century and am a Tyngall, I am able to appreciate one of nature's works of art in the shape of a fair woman. You would not believe it, hut my life has been a very lonely one."

"I don't see why that should interest me!"

"Come, come, you are not so short-sighted as you pretend. It ought to interest you very much. There are millions of women who would throw themselves down on their knees and offer up thanks at the prospect of having a Tyngall in marriage."

"A Tyngall—*in marriage!*"

Celia had by this time backed to the

extreme end of an alcove labeled: "History of Tranerica: Rise of the Tyngall Spratts." The dictator stood barring her exit—and escape seemed impossible.

"Oh, Harry!" she offered up her silent prayer. "Won't you come? Won't you come back soon?"

"My high position," continued her persecutor, in plaintive tones and with a wistful look in his eyes, "has made me meet too many women—and too few. They have swarmed about me, bent on matrimony; a Tyngall, as they well knew, would be a rare catch. You can't blame them of course; but, naturally, I didn't want to be caught. So I have remained a bachelor, though my heart cried out for the comforts of home and family. You are the first eligible lady I have ever met who didn't want to marry me. Consequently, I couldn't help falling in love. Let me congratulate you on your good fortune! My empire is at your feet! You shall be the first lady in Tranerica!"

Spratt ended with a flourish, and reached out his arms as if to enfold the object of his devotion. But she managed to take from the bookshelves a dusty tome on "Diplomatic Intrigues of the Twenty-Fourth Century," and imposed it between her and her suitor as a sort of shield.

"Mr. Spratt," she began to protest, in cool and haughty tones. "I—"

"Tyngall Spratt!" he corrected, scowling. "Always address me as Tyngall Spratt!"

"Tyngall Spratt," she amended, "I should be flattered, I suppose, at your attentions—"

"Not at all," he denied. "It is the just reward of your merits!"

"I should be flattered," she continued, "but you forget that I am already engaged."

"Pooh! What of it?" he scoffed. "I abrogate the engagement!"

"You also forget," she protested, angrily, "that I do not want it abrogated!"

"Your wishes in the matter, my dear lady," he returned, suavely, "are of no importance whatever. Remember, it is I who am accustomed to giving orders! When shall we place the date of the happy event?"

STILL secretly praying for Harry's return, Celia glanced along the aisles of books, desperately wondering if there were not some way to slip past the Tyngall.

"I'll admit," continued Spratt, solemnly, "it never occurred to me I was to marry a girl five hundred years old. But that doesn't matter, I suppose; you really don't look your age at all. One wouldn't think you were a day over nineteen."

"I'm only eighteen!" specified the girl, trying hard to keep back the tears that flooded to her eyes.

"Well, well, well! And you'll be the Tyngalless of Tranerica in less than a month! Let's see! It's now the first of January. January thirty-first was the day when my celebrated ancestor, Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Great, made his historic march to power. What more natural than that this day be chosen to solemnize the tie which, we may reasonably hope, will perpetuate his line?"

Celia made a struggling effort to reply, but her sobs prevented.

"Now, now, now, dear lady, don't let your emotion overcome you," soothed the Tyngall. "It's natural that you should weep tears of joy. Shall we not leave now, and go up for a lover's chat in the Crystal Room of my castle?"

Still the girl continued to weep, but the Tyngall meditated in a pleasant vein, "I'll have a busy month ahead. Sending out the announcements to all Tranerica—it will keep the air-waves

husy. Many women's hearts will be broken—but, alas! that can't be helped. I'm sure I couldn't find a worthier mate in all Tranerica, even if she does come from a barbarous century!"

Meanwhile, hetween her sobs, Celia mumhled hrokenly, "Harry! Harry! Where are you, Harry?" And her heart was heavy within her, for still her lover did not return, and she felt as if by intuition that some evll had befallen him.

CHAPTER VI

Amid the Mazes

WHILE Celia was examing the volumes in the library, Harry had strolled to the entrance of the building; for books had very little interest for him. Once outside, he had wandered a few yards away, to observe some individuals who were pasting some scraps of tin foil in a large folder marked "Curio Collections." From the absorhed interest with which they were preserving and labeling various worthless fragments of colored paper, Harry judged them to be not quite right in the head; and he was smiling pleasantly to himself, and reflecting on the superiority of his own age, when he saw a rush of excited men bearing down upon him.

"What is it? A football charge?" he had barely time to ask himself, before he was caught by the mob and forced to rush along with them in order not to he trampled. Being a powerful man, he might soon have extricated himself; hut curiosity had taken possession of him; and when the crowd halted with shouts and yells before a fenced enclosure containing a circular roadway, he halted with them and pressed forward to a position among the foremost. "The jigger races! The jigger races!" he heard them clamoring. "Hurrah! Hurrah! The jigger races!" And his neighbors began arguing loudly as to who would win, and bet hundreds of pebbles on the results.

A moment later dozens of little cars, each about as large as a motorcycle and running on gyroscopic wheels, were hrought upon the track, which was perhaps two hundred yards around and ten feet wide. A single rider mounted each vehicle; and almost instantly, at the blast of a whistle, they hegan whirling about the track, some going to the right and some to the left, but all moving so rapidly that they seemed mere gray blurs that passed with a whistling as of a great wind.

"What is it all ahout?" wondered Harry; and decided that the ohject was to see how near the riders could come to one another without hitting, for they constantly seemed to avoid collisions hy a hair's hreadth. Not always, however! for in a minute there came a thunderous crash, accompanied by a burst of flame; and, after water had been applied from a hydrant above, the shapeless remnants of two machines and their riders were swept away by a mechanioal attendant.

"Curses!" he heard a profane voice to his left. "By the blue lightnings, what luck! I've lost seventy pebhles!"

Even as these words were uttered, there came a second crash—which took two more machines and two more lives. But no one seemed disturbed, except certain pebble-losers, who grumbled loud and mournfully. The Jigger races, as Harry was afterwards told, were among the main sporting events of Tranerica—and although they cost a few million lives a year, no one begrudged the cost except a few stiff-backed humanitarians; for they served to kill time and to amuse the multitude.

But Harry, not being a native Tranerican, lost his taste for the sport after

witnessing the third fatal collision. As hastily as he could, he forced his way out of the crowd, glad that he had heen born in a more enlightened age.

IT was then that, with sudden sharpness, he remembered Celia and the Tyngall. "By Jove!" he told himself. "They'll think I've dropped through a black hole in the earth!" And he set out hastily to rejoin them—only to pause in bewilderment. His surroundings were unfamiliar! On all sides, as before, were lawns and shruhhery, crowded with people, and reaching to the extreme ends of the wide, interconnecting halls. But where was the lihrary?

"Good Lord," he mumhled, half aloud, "I didn't watch my directions!" And then, tapping a passer-hy on the shoulder, he inquired, "Beg pardon, friend, could you tell me the way to the lihrary?"

The man looked up startled, and regarded him with surprised watery eyes. "Why should you beg pardon?" he demanded. "You have done nothing to me. But you make a mistake in calling me friend. I have never seen you before."

"All right, all right," interrupted Harry, impatiently. "Cut out the gab, and tell me the way to the lihrary."

"Lihrary?" returned the man, looking puzzled. "Never heard of such a place."

"I mean, where they keep the hooks."

"Oh, the book-museum—as the boys like to call it! Yes, I do helieve there's one somewhere around, hut I couldn't tell you where. Haven't time for such things myself. I'm too husy collecting tin foil."

The man stared at Harry peculiarly, as one might at a harmless lunatic; then went amhling on his way.

"Gosh, hut they have strange types ln this century!" Harry reflected; and immediately accosted another passer-hy and repeated his question.

"Library? What do you want to get to the library for?" inquired the second stranger, a purple-faced individual with a cask-shaped abdomen. "There's nothing there to drink!" He likewise did not know the way; and this was the case with the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth and the seventh person that Harry stopped.

He now thought of asking a policeman; hut as there were only mechanical guards, who were not educated to answer questions, he had to dismiss this idea. It then occurred to him to request to be taken to the Tyngall. But the individual to whom he put this suggestion—a grave-looking bent old man—appeared horrified and at a loss for a reply.

"Evidently, sir," he finally said, "you are not a Tranerican. Most likely you're from Paneura or Afasia or some other remote region. Even if I couldn't tell that from your tone of voice, I would he sure of it from your question. Every Tranerican knows that no one can ever he taken to the Tyngall without heing summoned."

"But I *was* with the Tyngall, and lost him hy mistake!"

A skeptical smile cross the old man's face. "I have lived too long, sir," he said, severely, "to be gulled hy transparent falsehoods! The Tyngall does not associate with common people!"

With that the old man turned contemptuously on heel, and Harry had to resume the weary task of questioning strangers. But all without results! No one knew the way to the lihrary; no one would helieve that Harry had actually seen the Tyngall. Many inquired his number; and, heing told that he had none, they spit in disgust, or whirled ahout and refused further speech with him; for a man without number was a man without civil position, an outcast,

a pariah, a person beneath contempt.

From gallery to gallery Harry wandered, a deep uneasiness gnawing away within him, while nowhere could he see any sign of the library, and gradually the suspicion overcame him that each step he took was hringing him further from his goal.

BEWILDERED and disheartened, he slumped down on a stone bench beside a fountain. By now, he realized, Celia must be in agonies at his absence; she would imagine that some grave mishap had befallen him. And he himself, as he thought of her alone in this strange century with no one to protect her hut the Tyngall, felt half distracted. What would become of her should she remain at the mercy of that unhearahle Spratt, who already, as Harry had angrily noticed, had cast ogling eyes at the girl?

But was there not still some way to find the library? Was there no guidebook to point out the direction? With this hope in mind, Harry leapt to his feet again, and hailed a passer-hy, who proved most ohliging, hut stated that he had never heard of any guide-hook. A second passer-hy, however, offered more definite information—yes, indeed, there was a directory to all the Day Rooms. But where was it to be found? The man scratched his head, and then, after a moment, joyously gave the answer. The guidebook was in the library!

But since the informant, like the other Hivites, did not know the way to the lihrary, Harry found himself no better off than ever.

Disconsolately he started on his way again, through wide galleries, branching and interconnecting with maze-like intricacy, and apparently endless in extent. After a time his attention was attracted to a crowd of men and women who stood, hundreds deep, before a little closed gateway, shouting and gesticulating, and furiously pushing and shoving to get to a front position. Ahove them, on the wall, a huge megaphone projected; and from it a hawling voice proclaimed monotonously, "One only will he required! One only will be required! Form your lines to the left!"

But far from forming lines, the men and women made only a writhing mass, squirming and squeezing, with bruised shins, bloodied noses and blackened eyes; while fresh recruits came rushing from all sides.

"What is it? A convention of lunatics?" Harry asked addressing a sensitive-looking tall young woman who stood by with a faintly amused expression on his clear, candid countenance.

"I see you're a foreigner," replied the young man, courteously "A native wouldn't have to ask questions. What you see here is a crowd of candidates applying for a job."

"Applying for a joh? But I thought—"

"Thought that no one here has to work? Of course not! But most of us get so bored that when a joh is open we fight for it like maniacs. There's no pay naturally; it's merely something to pass the time. You see, a few supervisors are needed to operate the mechanical workers hy radio control; and also some inspectors to look at the factories now and then. Not enough to keep one man in a thousand occupied. That's why there's such a scramble, whenever a new joh is open."

HARRY had started to walk away with the young man, whom he rather liked; while from behind him rang the yells, screams, groans and snarls of the rapidly growing throng of job seekers.

"What's your number, sir?" inquired his new acquaintance after Harry had vainly asked him the way to the lihrary.

"I'm afraid I haven't any," Harry was forced to admit.

"No number?" A furtive expression came into the stranger's face; he pressed close to Harry, and whispered into his ears, "Neither have I!"

"Not for three years already!" he added, in barely audible tones, in response to Harry's puzzled glance. "You see, I'm a dangerous radical. I don't like the Tyngall system of government. I believe it leads to dry rot of the mind and spirit. There's nothing to do—nothing to strive for. It's my idea that most of the mechanical workers should be scrapped, and men put back on the jobs. That's what is called 'subversive doctrine.' On account of my youth, I was paroled on my first offense, with the loss of my number. The second offense would mean death."

"Your views sound pretty sensible to me," declared Harry. "Guess I'm a dangerous radical myself. But what do they call you, if you haven't any number?"

"My friends call me the Lightning Bolt. That's because I'm always so impetuous about everything."

"My friends call me Harry. Harry McNear."

"McNear? Harry McNear? What strange antique-sounding words! Well, Harry, since we're both numberless, maybe we can be friends!"

The hand of the Lightning Bolt shot out, and Harry took it warmly. And thus was sealed the bond of fellowship between the son of the twentieth century and the son of the twenty-fifth.

As the two wandered away together, a gong rang above them, and signs of excitement became evident among the men, women and children crowding the shaded walks and lawns of the Day Rooms. The reason for their agitation soon became visible in the shape of a company of mechanical workers, who strode in carrying great trays heaped with viands. Harry was reminded of the genii of the Arabian Nights, of whom he had read as a child; but there was something more familiar in the way the multitude swarmed forward, each person eager to be first in snatching the delicacies from the trays.

"What's the matter? Isn't there enough to go around?" inquired Harry, as he saw how avidly the people pushed and grabbed, not taking time to sit down, while swallowing the food by great gulps.

"More than enough!" replied the Lightning Bolt. "It's simply an old habit—inherited from a time when, they say, many couldn't be sure if they would have butter for their bread. The same rush occurs three times every day."

Harry and his new-found friend waited until the multitude had been fed; then, approaching one of the mechanical workers, helped themselves to some vegetables, fruit and cakes from one of the trays.

BUT they had hardly finished their repast when they were startled by the sound of a siren. "That's the signal to leave the Day Rooms until tomorrow," declared the Lightning Bolt. "We'll have to go up to our compartments for eight or nine hours of sleep."

"But I haven't any compartment," stated Harry.

"No? Then there's been some oversight on the part of the mechanical room clerk. But don't let that disturb you. You can share my compartment, if you wish."

"I'd be ever so much obliged, if it wouldn't put you out."

"Not at all. I live in three rooms with another numberless chap—we've plenty of spare space. Having no number, you see," he added, in a mournful whisper, "naturally I couldn't hope to

find any girl willing to marry me."

While the Ligbtning Bolt was speaking, Harry observed that several huge gates were swinging open, and that multitudes of little cushioned cars were waiting outside. Into these the people began pushing their way, trampling one another in their haste. But the Lightning Bolt, who seemed a most sensible person and did not at all live up to his name, gently took Harry's arm and led bim in another direction. "Let's walk," he suggested. "It's simpler, and saves a lot of trouble."

The next moment, be and Harry were springing side by side up long spiral iron stairways.

CHAPTER VII

A Fresh Blow

"YES, we're pretty comfortably located here," remarked the Lightning Bolt, as be entered bis compartment and turned the electric switch, which threw a flood of subdued radiance across three connecting rooms.

But Harry, as be surveyed tbose windowless chambers which exactly resembled the ones he had seen with the Tyngall, was surprised to notice that everything was as bare as a house after the tenants have moved. "Where's the furniture?" be demanded.

"Why, just wbere it should be," replied the Ligbtning Bolt; and pressed a button on the wall. Instantly several steel chairs unfolded themselves from hidden niches, and rattled into position. At the same time, the Ligbtning Bolt pressed another button, and a table unfolded from the floor; wbile a third button caused a collapsible couch to clatter into place.

"You see, everything is arranged for convenience," continued the proprietor, as he turned a screw and a faint cool current of washed air began to blow over tbem. "We can't expect to bave everything as comfortable as the Tyngall, but we bave little to complain of in tbat line—no, not in that line!"

Even as he spoke, the door opened, admitting an alert little man with a long intellectual face and keen restless eyes.

"Ob, Cipb, I was waiting for you!" the Lightning Bolt greeted bim. "I want you to meet my friend. He's one of us—hasn't any number. Call bim simply Kar—no, Har, I think it is—Harry!"

"A strange name!" commented the newcomer, extending his hand. "But I'm always glad to meet a numberless man, Harry."

"This is my roommate and best friend," the Lightning Bolt introduced, clapping "Ciph" affectionately on the shoulder. "Since he has no number, we call him the Cipher."

"Cipher?" echoed Harry.

"Yes, you see, that indicates wbat they thougbt I amounted to," continued "Ciph," in a brisk voice. "After I lost my number, my old friends abandoned me; they called me the Cipher in ridicule—and the name clung."

"But how did you come to lose your number?"

"Oh, I happened to get careless one day. I was having an argument with a friend, and the question arose wbether it was possible to conceive of a wiser and more humane system of life than that of the Hives. I answered with a rash Yes!; for sometimes I got tired of seeing mechanical workers all around me and would bave lived to do tbings for myself. Very incautiously I raised my voice, and was overheard, and reported. My statements being construed as a criticism of the government, I lost my number. Luckily, I was able to bring influence to bear with the judge—

which accounts for the fact that I'm still alive."

"Criticism of the government is treason," explained the Lightning Bolt. "Usually the suspect is executed on general principle. Hence the government is not very much critlcized."

UNTIL late in the night (or, rather, the period that passed for night, since all time divisions in the Hives were arbitrary), Harry sat up talking with his new friends, whom he came to like more and more as the hours wore on. He learned that both were secretly opposed to the Tyngall and his administration; and that thousands of others, likewise, were discontented, but did not dare to speak their minds; in fact, the subject of revolution had often been broached, althougb nothing in that line had been attempted for many decades. This knowledge, however, put a daring idea into Harry's mind—an idea on wbich he was to act far sooner than he could have anticipated.

The following morning, after spending a few hours tossing on the "spare couch" which his new friends had provided, Harry bathed in a fountain of warm water and was shaved by a mechanical valet; then accompanied the Cipher and the Lightning Bolt to the Day Rooms, where mechanical waiters were passing back and forth with the breakfast trays. "Do you know where the library is?" Harry asked the Cipher as a matter of course when they had eaten; and was astonished to receive a reply in the affirmative.

"Yes, I often go there," said the Cipher. "People think it dreadfully old-fashioned of me."

"Show me the way!" demanded Harry, although it was hardly to be expected that, after nearly twenty-four hours, Celia could be found there.

Yet to the library they hastened—only to find the building empty.

"Don't see how on earth I'm going to trace her now," Harry lamented, feeling as if the whole world were collapsing about his shoulders; for he had cherished the hope that at the library he would find, if not Celia herself, at least some message from her.

"No, I don't see how you're going to trace her," coincided the Lightning Bolt, who had heard Harry's whole story. "It would be as much as your life is forth to try to communicate with the Tyngall."

"But doubtless the Tyngall will take good care of her," contributed the Cipher, consolingly.

"Yes, too damned good care!" muttered Harry.

At this point their discussion was interrupted by a thunderous voice, which broke out with startling suddenness: "Attention! Attention! Attention, all Hivites!"

Hastening out of the library, they found that the voice issued from a series of megaphones high up on the wall.

"The radio!" mumbled the Lightning Bolt, a little awed. "It's only on state occasion that the radio speaks like this!"

"Attention! Attention! Attention, all Hivites!" repeated the megaphones. And people on all sides, children and adults alike, halted in their chattering and their games, and stood staring with wide-open mouths and gaping eyes.

There ensued a second of silence that seemed almost unnatural; then once more that booming voice sounded from the megaphones:

"Attention! Attention! All Hivites, attention! A momentous announcement, and one of great good omen, is to be made by His Preeminent Highness, Tyngall Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Seventh!"

"Tyngall! Oh, Tyngall! Hail Tyngall!" cried the people, in a confused chorus; while they flung themselves

down and kissed the earth in token of respect to their ruler.

NOW from the megaphones there poured a different voice—and one which Harry thought he recognized:

"My people, I know that you will rejoice with me on this day of great good fortune. I have tidings which will, I am sure, hring murmurs of happiness to the lips of you all. For a long while, as you know, my fate has been a lonely one. My well wishers have long urged me to unite my lot to that of some fair lady, and so give the country a Tyngalless, as well as the promise of an heir to the name and fortunes of the illustrious family of Spratt. But until the present moment, unahle to choose among the countless superh daughters of Tranerica, I have lived in dismal bachelorhood. Now, however, I have decided to change to a more hlessed lot. My nuptials will he celehrated on the thirty-first of this month."

The megaphone grew silent; and the people also remained dumb for a moment. Then, as the full meaning of their leader's announcement forced itself upon them, pandemonium hroke forth. There were cheers, yells and shouts: "Tyngall! Oh, Tyngall! Hail Tyngall! Hail Tyngall!" Tears glistened in many eyes; numhers of women hurst out weeping. And many men leapt about and damned with juhilant cries.

In Harry's heart, also, there was great rejoicing. "Thank God!" he reflected. "Now that the old devil's engaged, maybe he'll let Celia alone!"

"The numher of the hride," the voice from the megaphones rumhled on, while every one once more stood at attention, "may not be revealed just yet. But she comes, needless to say, of high and distinguished lineage; her pedigree has been traced hack more than five centuries. In order, however, that my people may early come to know and love the face of their future Tyngalless, I will order it to appear on the television screen."

It was hut the work of a minute for some mechanical workers to enter and erect television screens under the megaphones. And it was less than five minutes before a fair womanly face, larger than life-sized, appeared upon the screens with photographic distinctness, and in its natural colors.

As he gazed up at those features of the innocent pansy-like grace and flowing golden hair, Harry gasped, groaned, clenched his fists, and mumbled something that sounded like an oath. His day had turned hlack and hlank. The face on the screen was that of his betrothed!

CHAPTER VIII

Stroke Follows Stroke

"NOW, my dear young lady, isn't it just about time you stopped these foolish objections? It's all right, I'm told, for engaged people to quarrel once in a while, hut you've done nothing but quarrel. You should have a better sense of the dignity of your position!"

Up and down the glittering length of the Crystal Room the Tyngall stalked, his hands clasped behind his back, his brows compressed and scowling; while at one end of the hall a golden-haired figure sat in a hunched position, her face buried in her hands, her sohs coming forth in half-suppressed spasms.

"These tears, dear lady, are getting very tiresome," contlnued the dictator. "I've always heard the female sex required much humoring, and, hy the great name of Spratt! haven't I done everything possible to humor you?

However, my patience has its limits. There are not many persons who would risk exhausting the temper of a Tyngall!"

"But I don't want to marry you! I never said I wanted to!" came a pitiful voice from a corner of the hall.

"Nonsense, dear lady! A silly prejudice! Who wouldn't want to marry a Tyngall? You don't mean to say you'd rather have that long-faced, carrot-haired, ox-shouldered brute that accompanied you here from the twentieth century?"

"He's not an ox-shouldered brute!" denied the girl, rising with fists clenched. "And you've taken him away from me! You've hidden him! I don't know what you've done to him! I went him back! I want Harry back! I want him hack, do you understand?"

With one foot she stamped vigorously on the floor, while she stood facing him combatively, with flaming eyes.

"Who would ever have thought that such a meek-looking violet would show such spirit?" meditated the Tyngall. "Doubtless such wild and primitive passions were common in the twentieth century. But there is no use complaining, dear lady. The date of the marriage has been set. The whole country is awaiting the event. Harry is a little incident you will have to forget."

"Never!" denied Celia, again stamping on the floor.

"Never is a word you should not use carelessly, my lady. Sometimes, years hence, when you sit on your high throne, the mother of Tyngalls and Tyngallesses, you will think hack on these events, and smile at your youthful folly in wanting to wed a plebeian. Meanwhile, in order to help you forget, I forhid you ever to mention this red-haired beast—this Harry, as you call him."

"And what if I refuse?" demanded the girl, glaring at him out of her inflamed tear-wet eyes.

"Refuse?" Spratt took a stride across the room, paused to light a cigarette hrought to him hy a moving hand operating in a socket along the wall, and then turned coolly back to his intended hride. "Refuse? No one ever refuses the Tyngall. It just is not done, dear lady. There are—well, there are methods at my disposal."

"You can't threaten me!" she challenged, standing up to him defiantly.

"THREATEN *you?*" returned the Tyngall, between puffs at his cigarette. "That's the last thing I would think of. This man of yours—this Harry—would be the one to meet the bill. As I've told you, it would be very hard to find him, since he has no number—still, if I ordered it, we might locate him. In that case, he would be sorry he had come to the twenty-fifty century!"

Celia's face had suddenly gone white. "But you wouldn't!" she pleaded, "you wouldn't take it out on Harry—"

"Why not, dear lady? Naturally, I should dislike extreme measures. But if you cannot drive Harry out of your mind, I shall have no choice but to put him out of the way. Very regretfully, of course—hut very decisively!"

Celia gasped; then, sohhing once more, hurriedly turned aside.

The Tyngall stood looking after her with a vexed expression. "An accursed nuisance, these women!" he muttered to himself. "But you've got to show them who's master!"

After another puff at his cigarette, he pressed a wall-hutton, which sent two mechanical maids clattering to the service of his bethrothed. Then contemplatively he crossed the room, and stood looking out of the immense window down toward the Hudson and the black Titanic masses of the Hives. "Somewhere over there," he ruminated, "is this nuisance of a Harry. But he will

not be there much longer, unless his friend knows how to forget very quickly!"

* * *

The Tyngall would have heen even more displeased at the thought of Harry could he have witnessed certain events that had occurred in the Hives an hour or two before.

After receiving the news of Spratt's engagement and seeing the face on the screen, Harry had wandered away like one in a fog. His head was reeling; his fists were clenched; rage and terror fought for mastery of his mind. So suddenly, so unexpectedly had the blow descended that at first he could not grasp its full import; he could only realize, with a blazing indignation, that Celia had been snatched from him; and hewilderment and a sense of baffled impotence mingled with a bitter desire for revenge.

In the confusion of those first moments, he scarcely noticed where he went or what words came from his lips. "Damn the Tyngall!" he muttered, quite audibly, to give some outlet to his inflamed feelings. "Damn the Tyngall! Blast his soul to hell! I'll get the dog for this! I'll get him, I'll get him yet!"

He was hardly aware how crowds gathered ahout him, staring with wide, unbelieving eyes as he uttered these profanities; nor did he take any note of his friends as they hastened to his side and muttered warnings into his ears.

"For your life's sake," chided the Cipher, "have you gone out of your head? Hold your tongue, hold your tongue!"

"Silent, if you value your breath!" cautioned the Lightning Bolt. "What has come over you, that you want to commit suicide?"

"May the Tyngall and his kind be damned forever!" swore Harry, still too angry to heed any warnings. "The cursed swine! to lay his dirty paws on my girl—"

Most of the crowd looked grave and shocked at this impiety; one or two gasped with horror. But on several faces smiles appeared, and from somewhere in the rear a titter was heard.

"Hurry! Let's get out of here while there's still time!" the Lightning Bolt urged, plucking at Harry's sleeve, in the attempt to draw him away from the throng.

But even as he spoke, there came a sound that made him stop short, with a groan of despair.

From the opposite end of the room. a bell began to clang with heavy metallic peals as of a fire alarm. Sharp, insistent, and continuous, the niose was such as to drown out all conversations. The mob, as if petrified, stood glued in their tracks, their eyes gleaming with excitement, their agitated murmurs inaudible amid the din.

After about a moment, the hell became silent; hut even while the echoes still vibrated ominously, a distant clanking was heard, rapidly growing louder.

"By the crown of the Tyngall!" exclaimed the Cipher, mournfully. "Some one has rung the treason alarm!"

"But can't we still get away?" cried the Lightning Bolt, glancing about him like a caged animal.

But the multitude hedged them around with hostile hands uplifted and malevolent eyes.

It was only a minute before the clanking had grown to ear-splitting proportions; and half a dozen mechanical grimaces and screeches and yells gether furiously as if thus to make themselves appear more terrible, shouldered their way forward. Guided unerringly by remote radio control, they formed themselves in a circle about Harry and his two friends, and then hegan marching away with the three prisoners in their midst, to the accompaniment of a loud thump, thump, thump

that sounded a little like the tramping of an army. Behind them, with comical grimaces and screeches and wells of derision, the rabble followed; and stones and hits of earth came showering in their direction.

At the further end of the hall, the mechanical guards halted. One of them reached down, and opened a circular panel on the wall, revealing a slanting tube about a yard across; while a second drew forth three steel shells, each a little over six feet long, and just wide enougb to fit into the tube like a key into a lock. They then thrust each of the captives into one of the containers; after which there came a rattling sound, and the lid slipped down.

Forced irresistihly into the little steel box by the iron hands of the guard, Harry felt that bis last moment had come. As the cover rattled to a close above him, and be found himself in utter darkness in a space so small that he could move but a few inches in any direction, his beart leapt with terror at the thought that he was being buried alive; and he called out with cries that, he well knew, no one could hear, and heat against the steel walls until his fists hled.

Then suddenly he was aware that he was in motion. There came a swishing. hissing sound from outside; his head tipped downward, and only his beavy mat of hair saved him from serious injury as he banged against the front wall; he rolled from side to side, and could not control his movements.

IN that bewildered, terrified moment, he had given up all hope. It was almost with a shock, therefore, that he felt his steel container grating to a halt, saw the cover slide open above bim and was greeted by the welcome glow of electric lamps.

Still feeling stunned, he arose a little awkwardly, and found himself in a fair-sized room lined with intricate-looking machines. Just in front of him his two friends were also emerging from steel shells. Both looked dazed, and the Lightning Bolt was nursing bruises on his shins and arms; but both, like Harry, seemed glad to find themselves still alive.

"It really was nothing," declared the Cipher with a forced smile on his lean sagacious face. "I've often heard how terrihle it was to ride in the pneumatic tuhes, but after all, it's worth while to have had the experience."

"You see, the tubes are ordinarily used for freight," explained the Lightning Bolt. "But sometimes, as you have observed, they're employed for vicious criminals. That's considered part of the punishment."

"Wonder what they're going to do with us now," mused Harry, as he glanced curiously at the various machines that lined the room—machines each ahout ten feet high, with huge and complicated dials, a multitude of connecting wires, and long rihbed steel projections and rubber tubes tbat wound into the air like the feelers of an octopus.

"Why, there's no doubt what is to be done next," stated the Cipher, in a matter-of-fact manner. "We're to be tried."

"Tried?"

"Certainly. By the Mechanical Judge."

One of the iron workers had come clattering into the room as these words were spoken; and, with swift movements, seized the left wrist of eacb prisoner, and attacbed it to one of the projecting ruhber tuhes. Instantly little wheels moved on the machines, a low growling was heard from within them, and tbe dials began slowly turning.

"What do you mean hy a Mechanical Judge?" demanded Harry; while the iron worker took his right hand and made him hold a knoh connecting with

an electric wire.

"A Mechanical Judge," the Cipher declared, "represents the heigbt of judicial advance. Now that all decisions are machine-made, we can be sure they will be uniform quality. We can also be sure they will be swift, efficient, and positive. Besides, the Mechanical Judge cannot be bribed."

"No, but they say be can be fixed," contributed the Lightning Bolt.

"But how can you get decisions by machine?" asked Harry, with a skeptical smile. "The thing is impossible."

"Far from it!" denied the Cipber. "Tbe principle is really very simple. Why, didn't they have lie detectors long ago, so far back, I believe, as the twentieth century? We're merely enlarged upon the same idea. Everything that happens to a man, you see, leaves its reaction in his nervous system, and in his blood stream. Each incident, each thought arouses a faint electric current—very weak, it is true; yet a sufficiently powerful machine, with strong amplifiers, can register it and interpret it by its wave-length. So, if a man has treasonous ideas—"

HE was interrupted by a growl from one of the machines—a growl which sounded exactly like that of a bulldog.

"Tbe Mechanical Judge is getting ready for his decision," remarked the



Lightning Bolt, his hands fluttering with excitement.

"What! Is *that* the Mechanical Judge?" cried Harry, pointing in astonishment to the machines.

"Of course! Didn't you even know you were being tried?"

"No, I didn't realize it," admitted Harry, with a rueful glance at the rubber tube attached to his left hand, and the wire connecting with his right. And then, looking up with an attempt to be cheerful, he smiled, bowed toward one of the machines, and continued, facetiously, "I trust Your Honor will be good to us!"

A loud grumbling from inside the machine was the immediate response.

"Sure the Mechanical Judge never makes mistakes?" Harry went on, a little nervously. "I'd hate to see the wrong decision."

"Have no fear," returned the Cipher, mournfully. "They say his record of convictions is nearly one hundred per cent."

The next instant there came a sudden snapping sound from inside the largest machine, and a red hand shot up, along with some crimson notations.

"Prisoner Number 1," read an arrow pointing in the Cipher's direction, "ZX 1." . . . "Prisoner Number 2," said an arrow aimed at the Lightning Bolt, "ZX 2." . . . "Prisoner Number 3," announced an arrow that indicated Harry, "ZX 3."

"That's the decision, of course," stated the Cipher, extricating bimself from the rubber tube and wire. "There's a tahle at tbe end of the room to interpret the code."

All three hastily made their way across the room, and could hardly keep from groaning as they read: "ZX 1, Guilty of treason in the third degree. Confinement for fifty years. . . . ZX 2. Guilt of treason in the second degree—Confinement for life. . . . ZX 3. Guilty of treason in the first degree. Execution in thirty days."

CHAPTER IX

The Conspiracy

ALMOST before the three unfortunates bad had time to grasp the meaning of the sentence pronounced upon them, they were herded together by a corps of mechanical guards and forced once more into pneumatic tuhes. After another bewildering flight through the darkness, they emerged in a long corridor marked in huge hlack letters: "LOWER CLASS RESIDENTIAL QUARTERS." Not until later did Harry learn that by "lower class" the sign really meant "prison population;" for the meaning of the terms had altered in the course of the centuries, until the two were regarded as synonymous.

Feeling like one who has been dealt a stunning blow on the head, Harry allowed his mechanized jailors to prod him through several steel-barred gates and one or two winding iron hallways; while the Lightning Bolt and the Cipher accompanied him with drooping features and desolate eyes. Finally they reached a series of large connecting electrically lighted galleries or caverns, reminding Harry of the Day Rooms, except that there were no lawns or trees, but only concrete floors and patches of gravel and sand, overarched by a high vaulted ceiling supported by steed columns. In these spacious reaches, thousands of men and women were gathered, engaged in various tasks and pastimes which seemed to Harry to contrast strangely with the occupations of the free citizens.

It tended to take his mind off his own trouhles to watch these prisoners, who

did not at all meet his preconceived conception of "jailbirds." Here a man, bespectacled and patriarchal-looking, would he studiously reading from a hoary old tome; here a young scientist would he poring through a microscope, and making notes and drawings; here a painter would be standing with his palette and hrushes, or a sculptor with a half finished hust; while some of the inmates were filling immense volumes with pencilled notations, others were practicing at musical instruments, and still others were gathered into little knots, soberly talking.

From the finely developed faces, the massive brows, the keen eyes of the prisoners, Harry was at once aware that these were persons of a different type from those in the Day Rooms. It was evident at a glance that they were the most talented, the most intellectual representatives of the twenty-fifth century!

"Is this really the prison?" asked Harry, in wonder. "Isn't there some mistake—"

"No, there is no mistake," returned the Cipher, grimly. "This is the prison, all right."

"Or, as they prefer to call it, the l o w e r class residential quarters," amended the Lightning Bolt.

"It might be all right for a few days," declared the Cipher, with a sigh, "but as a resort for the next fifty years, I don't exactly fancy it."

"Think of me!" pointed out the Lightning Bolt, enviously. "I didn't get off with a mere fifty years! They gave me life!"

"I have only thirty days!" groaned Harry, thinking of his impending doom.

"Yes, lucky fellow! Your misery will soon be over!" returned the Lightning Bolt, in a congratulatory manner.

"I DON'T know what he's done to deserve such preference!" mourned the Cipher. "A swift and painless end —electrocution hy one quickly delivered radio bolt—and then nothing more to worry ahout for all eternity! Too bad, too bad not every one can have such good fortunte!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Harry, more than a little irritated. "Do you think I came from the twentieth century just in order to be electrocuted?"

"There are worse fates than that! Yes, there are worse fates than that!" sighed the Cipher. "Think of my fifty years!"

"Think of my lifetime!" moaned the Lightning Bolt. "I'm only twenty-eight. And modern science has made such frightful progress I may live to be a hundred!"

"Well, I'm going to live to be a hundred, too—if I can find any way!" asserted Harry. "Do you think I'll lie down and let myself be executed just hecause a machine condemned me? Not on your life! I've got thirty days yet—and a lot can happen in thirty days!"

"Not in the prison!" lamented the Cipher.

"You mean, the lower residential quarters," corrected the Lightning Bolt.

"What I'm wondering," reflected Harry, as he looked out across the wide hall at his multitudes of fellow victims, "what I'm wondering is if some of us down here can't get together, and bolt for freedom."

"It's no use," mumbled the Cipher. "There's nowhere to bolt to."

"Still, aren't most of us pretty much in the same boat?" Harry went on, disregarding this remark.

"Same what? Same boat?" came in one voice from his two friends, to whom this twentieth century idiom was unfamiliar.

"I mean, we've all got nothing to lose but our chains. Any of these other

folks here sentenced to death?"

"Ahout half, I should say," estimated the Cipher.

"And the other half are in for twenty years or over," added the Lightning Bolt. "The mechanical judge isn't geared to give short sentences."

"Good!" pronounced Harry, with enthusiasm, as by degrees a daring plan took shape in his mind. "Then every one here is our natural ally. What if we were to rise up, all of us, and strike out—"

"By the eyes of the Tyngall, not so loud!" interrupted the Lightning Bolt, as he clutched warningly at Harry's arm.

"No—if you don't want to die hy torture, keep your voice down!" coincided the Cipher.

"Don't you realize, the air tappers may get you?" the Lightning Bolt demanded. "By their secret radio waves, they can listen in on conversations anywhere. It's getting so nowadays that nothing is safe that's spoken above a whisper."

HARRY glanced about him anxiously, as if to make sure that no one was within hearing distance.

"It doesn't matter where you are," declared the Cipher. "They can hear you as well a mile away as a foot."

"Anyhow, you've got to listen to me!" insisted Harry, in undertones. And he led his unwilling friends to a little hidden niche between two great steel pillars, and prepared to unfold his scheme.

"I've got just thirty days to work in," he declared, hastily, hut careful to keep his voice to a whisper. "In that time the Tyngall has to be thrown down, like the rat that he is, and we've got to make ourselves the lords of Tranerica."

"There have heen others with the same idea, my boy," nodded the Cipher, drearily. "In most cases a well-aimed radio bolt has ended their dreams."

"Why should it be a dream?" argued Harry. "Don't you realize how vulnerahle the Tyndall is? Why, he depends for his power exclusively upon the mechanical guards and workers!"

"Very true—and each mechanical worker has from a thousand to ten thousand man-power," sighed the Lightning Bolt.

"Yes, hut they are all controlled by small groups of men, are they not?" Harry went on hastily, incautiously lifting his voice, so that his companions had to warn him again. "The real rulers of Tranerica are the men that guide the mechanical workers. These are hut few in number. If they were captured, or made to obey our will, we could move the mechanical workers as we wished—and it would be we that ruled Tranerica."

"Yes, that's so in a way," admitted the Cipher, looking thoughtful. "The only question is how to capture the radio operators."

"It reminds me of the ancient fable of the mice and the cat," contributed the Lightning Bolt, with a mournful grimace. "We're all nicely agreed to bell Mr. Cat—the only question is, which hero is to attempt it?"

"I don't call myself a hero, hut I'll attempt it!" averred Harry. "That is," be added, more soberly, "if I get cooperation. One man alone can't move a mountain."

"Well, I'm with you," swore the Cipher. "At the worst, I may be rewarded by speedy execution."

"Me too!" concurred the Lightning Bolt. "I'm a desperate man, with seventy or seventy-five years looming ahead of me. I don't think you have the shadow of a chance to win out, hut if I'm lucky I may be caught and electrocuted."

"No reason you should be caught!" denied Harry. And then, drawing his friends more deeply into the niche be-

tween the two columns, he glanced apprehensively in all directions; and resumed the discussion in a whisper.

For several bours the conference continued, while the three conspirators planned, weighed and debated. Gradually a more determined light came into the eyes of Harry's two friends, as though tbey had been infected hy his enthusiasm; gradually Harry bimself began to sbow the signs of faint triumpb; while his excitement, suppressed with difficulty, slowly mounted, and there was a fierceness in his manner, as of a would-be conqueror.

The discussion was interrupted by the passage of several mechanical waiters bearing food—scanty and flavorless victuals, as compared with the abundant repasts enjoyed in the Day Rooms, hut with the compensating feature that there was no wild rush to be the first served. Somewhat later, the lights were put out, and the prisoners were compelled to spend eight hours of darkness stretched out on the sand or gravel or on couches of straw; for tbe theory of the law was that, not been fully buman, they were not entitled to humane accommodations. But all during the meal period and a good part of the time allotted for slumber, the whispered conversation of the three plotters continued; and by the following day their plans had begun to take shape.

DURING the next week or two, many furtive discussions were beld in the Lower Residential Quarters. The Lightning Bolt, the Cipher and Harry were seen to pass continually from place to place, accosting likely-looking fellow prisoners; and the discussions they held always took place in some concealed spot and were conducted in whispers. Many of those whom they interviewed, it was later learned, were converted into apostles for the Cause, and began preaching in undertones to their friends and acquaintances, large numbers of whom in turn became ardent advocates of the insurrectionary movement. "Since we are condemned to death, or worse than death," was their argument, "why not give our lives fighting?" But they were cautious to keep all such sentiments scrupulously hushed, and not to gather in large or suspicious-looking crowds. In every beart there was the dread that some mishap or hlunder, some unguarded or treasonous remark, would betray the plans and condemn the conspirators to the torture chambers; in every beart was the wild hope that the seemingly impossible would happen, and the first successful revolt in centuries would occur.

All the prisoners meanwhile weigbed and reviewed every detail of the design, examining and re-examining it so as to avoid every pitfall. And all looked forward in apprehension and fierce longing to the thirtieth of January, the day hefore the Tyngall's marriage, when three numherless men were to lead their thousands in a desperate gamble with fate.

CHAPTER X

At the Eleventh Hour

FORTY-EIGHT hours before the time of his prospective execution, Harry was carried hy one of his mechanized jailors into a large, bare, hlack-walled room. This was the "Deatb Chamber"; and here it was that scores of wretches, men and women of all ages, were miserably moping in anticipation of the bolt that was to end their existence. Some of these poor doomed persons cowered in eorners, muttering to themselves; others ranged restlessly hack and forth; still others stood apart and prayed; hut in the frigbtened glances and hopeless looks

of them all was written the mark of the sentence that bovered above them.

Meanwhile, in the interest of what was known as "humanized killing," the final rites were being administered by the Mecbanical Preacher. This was an iron machine built to look exactly like a man. It was dressed in a long flowing black robe, and wore a white collar, closed in front; it was equipped with a mask which, unless one approached very close, might have been mistaken for a human face; and it moved its hands with measured gesticulations and hent and unbent its creaking frame in a manner that appeared most life-like. Even its voice, whicb came forth in a melancboly drone, seemed natural and quite human, and a stranger might never have known that there was a phonograpb cleverly concealed where its heart should have been, and that this reeled off any number of records in succession owlng to an automatic electric adjustment.

"Repent, and receive absolution for your sins," the Mechanical Preacher was saying. "Repent, and receive absolution! It is a long road that leads to spiritual redemption, but the punishment which is being meted out to you, my brothers, is for your own good no less than that of the State—"

On and on in this vein the Mechanical Preacher went never-endingly. At first Harry found the long-winded monotonous sentences quite annoying, hut after a time be did not even notice them; and he was told that this was the way with most of the prisoners. In fact, some of them spoke of the Preacher in the most favorable terms; for he served as an anodyne for pain, and belped to put them to sleep.

For several hours after his confinement, Harry walked restlessly back and forth along the hundred-foot length of the Death Chamber. His eyes were tense and excited; they were filled with an eagerness, one migbt say an anticipation hardly to be expected in one who was so soon to die. He scarcely observed his fellow prisoners; but almost constantly his gaze was on the great clock that dangled from the ceiling, as if he were anxious for bis few remaining moments on earth to be ticked away.

At last a gong sounded with a bollow note, like the stroke of doom; and a voice through a megaphone proclaimed: Visitin' Hour! For the next sixty minutes, the inmates of the Death Chamber may receive their friends, in order to exchange final farewells!"

NO sooner had these words been spoken than the doors were thrown open, and hundreds of men, women and children came crowding in, crying, sbouting, weeping and wailing as they threw themselves around the necks of relatives and friends and clung to them with despairing arms. Amid the throng of newcomers, Harry soon made out two familiar faces; and motioning to the Cipher and the Lightning Bolt, he led them to a corner of the room, where they could talk in relative seclusion. But, in any case, the commotion about them was so loud and continuous that there was little danger that they would be overheard.

"Well?" Harry demanded, as much with a movement of his lips as in actual words. "Everything ready?"

"All prepared to cut the wires?"

"We have three men secretly stationed with steel-cutting shears."

"How about the flasb-lights?"

"A thousand of them are hidden. Four of our comrades almost gave their lives to steal them from the warehouse when tbe mechanical guards were off duty."

"Good! And everybody is prepared to strike?"

"Everybody. We but await your orders."

"Then let the time be the second hour before the night sleep! Now go—so as not to arouse suspicion!"

"Good-bye—and may fortune bless our enterprise!"

"May the helper of all good causes be with you, Harry! The risk is a desperate one—but we may win out!"

Before leaving, Harry's two friends both flung their arms about his shoulders, and burst into bitter lamentations—so as not to attract attention by behaving differently from the other visitors. Then, without so much as a final nod, they turned and were lost amid the multitude. But Harry, smiling, brushed back his heavy locks proudly, almost exultantly, and stood aloof in one corner, gazing out at the crowd with a forceful expectant light in his eyes.

It was several hours later when pandemonium broke forth outside the Death Chamber, in the heart of the Lower Class Residential Quarter. The commotion began with the suddenness of a dynamite discharge; all at once there arose a clamor of shouts, yells, screams, hoots and howls, accompanied by a noise of thumping, banging, and hammering. The occupants of the Death Chamber, rushing to the barred windows, were astonished to see hundreds of their fellow prisoners marching in rough military formation, equipped with sticks, rods and poles, which they waved in air or knocked against the ground or stone columns, while crying out at the tops of their voices. But most of all the spectators were amazed to hear that sacrilegious call dinning through the air, "Down with the Tyngall! Away with the Tyngall! A new government! A new government for Tranerica!"

Hardly had the tumult begun than another and more ominous sound was heard in the distance. There came a booming as of thunder, accompanied by a rapid vibrant rattling, as of a nest of machine-guns in action; and a company of mechanical guards, each ten feet tall, came roaring forward with the speed of an express train. The watchers at the barred windows gasped; in another moment, they thought, the machines would scatter the rebels like toy soldiers. Some averted their eyes, not wishing to see the red chaos of bodies trampled and torn; others cried out in apprehension, expecting in an instant to hear the yells of the mangled and dying. But just before the crisis, when the iron guards were within hand's grasp of the rioters, an unforeseen event intruded.

WITH electrifying suddenness, the lights went out. Not so much as a flicker of warning did they give; they flashed from existence to non-existence with the speed of a fading meteor. Blackness covered the prison chambers—blackness absolute and unbroken, except where here and there a firefly flicker, shot from the eye of a flashlight, wavered uncannily through the gloom. Yet from the darkness there strangely, fantastically rang a sound of merriment—a burst of laughter, wild and triumphant, that rose in mocking peals and reverberations, like the glee of a victorious multitude.

As he stood clutching the bars of the Death Chamber, Harry caught the contagion of that cry; and from his lips too there came something that sounded like a laugh; while his eyes, as they gazed out into the blankness, exuded tears of thankfulness. The first step in the plot, long and carefully planned, had been accomplished! The wires that supplied the prison with light had been out, and consequently the mechanical guards had been rendered useless; for they could be controlled only when seen through television reflectors by the remote operators! They were now standing stiff and motionless, mere inani-

mate hulks of metal which no man need fear so long as they remained in darkness!

While he secretly exulted in this first success, Harry observed that the second step was already heing attempted. He saw a number of small flickering lights rapidly approaching, and knew that each was a flashlight carried hy a small party of men. Then he heard a furious hammering and banging, and was aware that the bars of the Death Chamber, which had not been huilt in the expectation of any concerted assault, were giving way heneath the pummeling of the moh outside. It was hut a minute before iron truncheons had hammered down the doors and windows; and Harry and his fellow convicts, shouting with joy, were received into the arms of their rescuers, who burst in through the torch-lit blackness like a conquering army.

Then away they all rushed into the wider chambers of the general prison, where mysterious movements and hustlings were to he heard from amid the darkness and shadowy figures flitted hack and forth like shades. And now they turned to meet a new menace; a glare as of a cluster of locomotive headlights appeared suddenly out of the distance, and moved forward with dizzying speed, accompanied by the clank, clank, clank that told of the invasion of a new company of mechanical soldiers.

Side by side with the iron giants, two or three men were to he seen moving in agile little cars, guiding the troops as they thundered forward. Was the revolution to be nipped in the very bud? But no! just when the advancing militia seemed ahout to crush the revolters under heel, the glare of the headlights grew dim and vanished; and the men in the little cars glided over to the rebels and mingled with them. The insurrectionists, acting through one of their number whose term in prison had expired a few days before, had not neglected the precaution of enlisting the support of the flesh-and-blood workers that controlled the mechanical emergency troops!

NOW began the most precarious step of all. "This way, boys," whispered Harry, as some one passed him a flashlight; and, with the Cipher and the Lightning Bolt at his heels, followed by swarms of other supporters, he began moving through the dimness to the extreme end of the prison, where a vent three feet across marked the termination of one of the pneumatic tubes. Since the iron gates were locked and were much too stout to be taken hy storm, the pneumatic tubes represented the only means of egrees from the Lower Class Residential Quarters. To attempt to escape through these long dark passageways would be hazardous in the extreme; there was no way of saying where the men would emerge, or whether or not they might not all be bottled up in a trap. But since no other means was possihle, the risk was one that must be faced.

"Keep within touching distance of each other—and be sure your flashlights are ready," directed Harry. And then, without hesitation, he drew down the iron lid of the pneumatic tube, and crept into the darkness.

CHAPTER XI

The Assault on Hive W

IT seemed to Harry that he crawled for miles through that close, hot, lightless tuhe, his only illumination the feeble rays of the flashlight. At times the tunnel dipped sharply and he was on the point of slipping and hreak-

ing his legs in the abyss; at other times it rose as sharply, and he could pull himself up only hy the utmost straining. Behind him he could hear his followers panting, one close after another, sometimes mumhling beneath their hreath, sometimes growling oaths and curses; and he too felt like hursting into profanity as he moved slowly through the endless labyrinth. What if he should never find his way out at all? What if he and all his supporters should perish in these mine-like depths? Or what if one of the steel freight-carriers should come shooting through the tube and annihilate them all? He well knew that the electrical connections had been cut, making this impossible; yet his mind swam, and it was not possihilities alone that alarmed him.

But at all times one thought was uppermost: the thought of the Tyngall, and of Celia; of Celia hright and smiling as when he had left her, and of Celia struggling in the dictator's arms. And it was the latter vision which, standing forth lurid and feverish in his oppressed imagination, dominated and drove him on like a goad, until he would sooner have perished in misery than have thought of turning back. Yet was he not already too late to save Celia?

It may have been after hours of groping through the tube that the flashlight at length showed a solid barrier ahead, and Harry knew that they were coming to a fresh phase of their adventure. To slip off the lid of the tuhe and emerge would now be a simple matter—hut where would they emerge? Would they thrust themselves straight into the waiting arms of their enemies?

For a moment Harry hesitated, while he could hear his followers heavily hreathing hehind him. Then, with painstaking caution, he drew back the lid of the tube a fraction of an inch. A circular slit of dim light became visihle; and Harry, putting one eye to the aperture, gave a satisfied grunt and opened the lid to its full width. A moment later, he had slipped out into a broad, faintly lighted corridor, which was unoccupied and hare except for a numher of large cases piled up at one side.

"It's one of the storage rooms," stated the Lightning Bolt, who had come out just after Harry. "Good! Very good! They'll never look for us here!"

"Well, now that we're out of jail, I don't propose to let myself be taken back alive!" Harry swore. "Which way shall we go?"

HE glanced about him uncertainly; and, since one choice seemed as good as another, he turned at random to his left, and hegan moving stealthily along one of the walls, with his followers pressing hehind him in a long line.

For several hundred yards they moved through the long, deserted gallery. Their steps were slow and muffled, their eyes alert for the sign of every suspicious presence. But no danger signal appeared; and they were feeling just a little more confident when, creeping around a turn in the gallery Harry found himself face to face with a sight that caused his heart to give a great leap and his whole form to shudder involuntarily.

A corps of eight mechanical guards, each twelve feet tall, stared at him almost within touching distance!

In a panic, he was ahout to turn and flee; hut the Cipher, darting up hehind him, drew him back with a restraining, "Come, come, there's no danger! These guards are merely being stored here, and are not in use at the moment."

"Yes, hut they may he in use very soon!" protested Harry.

"Not if I can help it!" denied the Cipher. And he approached the foremost giant, and, drawing open a little iron door in its trunk, revealed a num-

her of glass bulbs, like the tubes of a radio. These he battered to bits with a steel rod; while some of his companions performed similar services for the other seven guards. "That will fix them," he said. "They are now about as useful as a motor can without a motor."

"Or a man without a heart," put in the Lightning Bolt.

Again the procession started on its way, through a long series of storage rooms. "Do you suppose they know where we are? Do you suppose we are being followed?" was the question on every one's lips. But nowhere was there any sign of pursners, and it was assumed that their escape in the darkness had put their enemies off the trail.

As they crept on their way, they took time to examine the crates and boxes piled about them. In some of the cases they found canned and dried goods, which they seized avidly; and bottled beverages, with which they quenched their thirst. But what Harry leapt upon with a shout of especial joy was a case of "riflecs"—a development upon the old-time rifles,—instruments as compact and easily carried as rifles and yet capable of discharging as many bullets as machine-guns. Arming himself and several score of his followers with these redoubtable weapons along with a sufficiency of ammunition, Harry for the first time felt capable of facing attack.

"Just where do you think we are?" he paused to inquire of the Cipher, after they had wandered through other long, connecting storage rooms. "It seems as if we might go on forever like this, without ever getting anywhere."

"All the storage rooms are deep underground beneath the Hives," stated the Cipher. "What we must do is try to work up."

ACTING upon this advice, Harry led his followers up several winding stairways to still other dimly lighted corridors, which also served for storage purposes. But he was as uncertain as ever of the way out; and in his heart a new fear began to gather—the dread that he would waste so much time amid these mazes that it would he impossihle to strike before the Tyngall's marriage to Celia.

But when he was most tormented by this thought, a startled cry sent a new wave of hope rushing over him. "See that little green light down there—way down there!" shouted the Lighning Bolt, pointing toward the end of the corridor, two or three hundred yards off. "That means an exit."

"Yes—green is always the sign of an exit!" affirmed several of the others.

When they had reached the indicated point, they observed a sliding platform, similar to the old-time escalators but much larger, which began moving upon the turning of a switch and bore them up several hundred feet. They now found themselves in a dimly lighted circular chamber from which numerous hallways hranched in all directions; while in the center stood a huge signpost with colored pointers: "To the Day Rooms. . . . To the Mills. . . . To Hive M. . . . To the Crystal Tower. . . . To Hive J. . . . To Hive W. . . ." But still they saw no sign of any other living creature.

"Good! This is just made to order!" exclaimed the Lightning Bolt, coming up and clapping Harry affectionately on the shoulder. "We're still in the hours of sleep—or the nightime, as I believe you ancients called it. That's why the lights are all dim and the place is deserted. We'll have to make the best of our opportunity before the hours of waking."

"If we could only find our way to the central office," meditated Harry. "That is, the room where the radio engineers direct the mechanical workers by re-

mote control!"

"Then let's go to Hive W," suggested the Cipher. "I helieve I've heard it said that Hive W is the place. On the hundreth floor, if I remember correctly—"

"Yes, that's it!" corroborated the Lightning Bolt. "It's the very nerve-center of Hudson Highlands."

"I'm afraid we haven't time before the hours of waking," warned the Cipher, as the long column started stealthily away again. "If we're caught —well, you know the probahle end!"

Hastening his footsteps, Harry made his way through intricate winding galleries, following a green line varied with an occasional arrow that read, "To Hive W." At any moment, he knew, the wall hulbs might flash into hrilliance, mechanical guards might start clattering toward him, and he and his men might hopelessly trapped. It seemed a long while before a large sign in dull red announced, "HIVE W. First Floor." But the real difficulties, apparently, only commenced when they started the ascent toward the hundredth floor.

The stairways, narrow and tortuous, appeared never-ending; they purposely avoided the main passageways and followed dim hack-flights among whose shadows each moment they expected to see some lurking foe leap up. Thirty, forty stories they ascended; then, panting and half exhausted, had to pause for hreath; then once more resumed the weary climh, constantly afraid that the reviving lights of the "waking hours" would catch them unprepared.

"Can it he that the Tyngall is laying a trap, and is waiting for us to step into it?" they asked, a little surprised that they had not heen molested.

But more and more they were hecoming convinced that their escape through the pneumatic tubes had been unobserved.

THEY had a little of the feeling of triumphant mountain climbers when at length a sign announced: "Hundredth floor: Division of radio operation." . . . "This way," directed Harry, starting down a corridor hearing the placard, "To the Main Headquarters"; and he was congratulating himself upon being within a hair's hreadth of success, when suddenly, to every one's consternation, a row of dazzling white lights hurst out, flooding them with a radiance as of daylight.

"By the eyes of the Tyngall!" groaned the Cipher. "The hours of sleep are over!"

"If we don't retreat like a shot, we'll be caught!" wailed the Lightning Bolt.

"But where will we retreat to?" demanded Harry, hlinking heneath the sudden hrilliance. "I'd just as soon he taken face forward as with my hack turned!"

"If you don't hurry, it will be too late to turn your hack!" insisted the Lightning Bolt, making a sudden ahout-face. "If you think I have any craving for the torture chamhers—"

"Caught hot-footed as spies in the radio section—it's a Grade A offense!" lamented the Cipher. "To be torn limb from limh would be nothing hy comparison—"

"Retreat at a time like this is the hetter part of valor!" sighed the Lightning Bolt, as, amid a confused, panicky throng, he hegan pushing his way hack with increasing speed.

"Run, if you want, like cowards!" snarled Harry, seeing his whole revolt ahout to collapse. "I'm going on!"

Firmly grasping his riflec, he strode forward a pace or two, while the others wavered and halted. Then involuntarily he stopped short, with a gasp of dismay. A doorway half a score of yards away opened, and eight or ten gaudily attired toga-wearing men dismounted from little cushioned cars.

To Harry's overheated fancy, it was clear that his conspiracy had been tracked down—that the newcomers were the first of a contingent of police. But if he must die fighting he was at all events determined to sell his life dearly. Darting forward again he pointed his riflec threateningly at the newcomers.

He was a little surprised to note the astonishment on their faces; the look of startled horror that possessed them all.

For a moment they stood staring at him in amazement that showed just a little of incredulity, as if they could not quite trust the testimony of their own eyes.

"What—what in the Tyngall's name do you do here?" the foremost of the strangers at last demanded.

"Don't move one step—not one step!" warned Harry, turning his riflec toward the speaker's heart.

"What are you—a madman?" shot out the menaced one, indignantly.

"AND what are those fellow lunatics of yours?" bawled a second of the toga-wearing ones, pointing to Harry's followers, who had rallied and were drawing around with their riflecs pointed. "What can they want of us, mere inoffensive radio operators—"

"Radio operators?" Harry echoed, a sudden light bursting upon him; and his head reeled at the giddy prospects that suddenly unraveled. "Radio operators? So you're the ones that move the mechanical workers?"

"Yes—and you're keeping us from our duties!" cried one of the victims, accusingly. "Until you let us go, not a laborer will lift an arm in the Mills, not a waiter will serve breakfast in the Day Rooms, not a guard in the Lower Residential Quarters—"

"Enough! We have other duties for you!" Harry interrupted, sternly. "Forward march—all of you! Into the engineering rooms! You will move the mechanical workers and guards—but only as we say! Forward—unless you want some riflec bullets through your heads!"

The engineers hesitated. But, on all sides, they saw the iron muzzles pointed at them. Weaponless and outnumbered, they had no choice!

Muttering curses and scowling, their leader slowly stepped forward, drew a key from his pocket, and reluctantly fitted it into the lock of a door marked "Central Engineering Room."

"We obey—under protest!" he barked at Harry, as he cowered beneath the rifle. "But who in the name of the green lightnings may you be?"

"Me?" Harry drew out his chest, and stood proud and erect, an imposing figure of more than six feet. "I should advise you to be more respectful, sir, in addressing the next Tyngall of Tranerica!"

CHAPTER XII

The Ceremonies Are Interrupted

IN the Golden Room of the Tyngall's palace, the preparations had been completed. The heavy yellow metal, which of old had been valued by tradesmen and bankers but was now used chiefly as an ornament, filled the spacious hall with its gleam and its glitter. Gold-leaf shone from the high fretted ceiling; gold-leaf glistened along the walls; the wide polished mirrors had frames of solid gold; there were golden trays and platters, and tables with gold tops; the very chairs were upholstered in gold-braided cloth, and the tapestries were gold-inwrought; while the busts and figurines that littered the room were of the unalloyed metal.

Into this sumptuous hall, early on the morning of the thirty-first of Jan-

uary, there filed a notahle company. High-ranking dignitaries, all of whom bore in their veins a drop or two of the nohle blood of Spratt, came trooping in clad in their dress-togas of shimmering lilac, orange, cherry or lemon; while their spouses, with their pantaloons and high-huttoned jackets of dignified hrown or gray as became the gentler sex, accompanied them sedately, or followed in little chattering parties, bearing gifts of golden flowers or of fruits neatly fashioned in gold. Excitement was in the air, particularly where the ladies gathered in their fluttering groups. . . . "Oh, what do you think she's like? . . . I really don't care for her picture. . . . They say she's a foreigner—Think of that! . . . Wonder where he could have picked her up? . . . Must be a very forward type, otherwise our Tyngall, poor susceptible man! would never have been taken in!"

Such were hut a few of the comments whispered from ear to ear as the company gathered and at length formed itself in a crowd hundreds deep. As time went on, gay strains of music, appropriate to the occasion, filled the air from an unseen radio receiver; huge floral wreaths were borne in; and a song, "All hail the Tyngall!" was sung hy a chorus of dozens of voices. Finally, amid an awed hush, the chief functionary arrived; a man bearing the honorary ancient title of "Minister," although he had long ceased to have any religious duties other than those of signing hirth certificates and marriage contracts. All clad in a glossy golden robe, with a tufted golden headdress and golden sandals, he strutted into the room with a due sense of the dignity of his position—so much so that one might have wondered if it were not he rather than the Tyngall that was to be married.

Time wore on; and the guests, amid their chirpings and gossipings, hegan to grow impatient. Every now and then the spectators would glance uneasily toward a little gold-enmeshed door, from which the hride and hridegroom were expected to emerge; hut the door did not open, and anxious speculations hegan to be circulated as the minutes dragged away. Even the Minister, tugging at his tufted headgear, beneath which he was sweating profusely, began to look irritated; although, of course, the dignity of his position forhade him to make any remark.

MEANWHILE, hehind the little gold-enmeshed door, the dictator stood glaring at his intended spouse, who sat hunched up in a chair, her tear-stained face huried in her arms.

"Come, come, dear lady," he harangued, in tones of great annoyance, "this is a fine way to carry on! Not for nothing did the ancient sages call women the most unreliahle creatures that ever walked the earth. Here the wedding guests are all assemhled, and the most elahorate ceremony in half a century has heen prepared, and what do you do? —You weep! Yes, weep! and get your face all red and ugly! Do you think I want to present my hride in that condition?"

With an expression of disgust on his pale, puffy features, the Tyngall ran one hand despairingly across his hald pate; while he took a deliberate stride or two ahout the room.

"A splendid way to start our married life!" he went on. "You'd better pull yourself together, I warn you—or they'll be no happy days ahead for either of us! Here—I'll tell you what!"—He paused long enough to glance at the great clock on the opposite wall. "I'll give you just half an hour. In that time you'll he ahle to wash and powder up a hit, and look as the hride of a Spratt should!"

"But I don't want to be the hride of

a Spratt!" she sobbed.

"Nonsense, dear lady! The point is too silly to be worth arguing. When destiny brings you a great gift, the thing to do is to accept it—and not question whether you want it or not."

He was interrupted by a voice that sounded through a little tube high up on the wall. "Your Excellency, Tyngall Spratt! I beg leave to inform you that the guests are growing more impatient. Unpleasant rumors are springing up. What shall I tell them now?"

"Tell them the bride is still arranging the details of her outfit!" growled the dictator, recognizing the voice of his secretary.

"You see, there's no use being childish," the Tyngall went on, turning back to the sobbing figure. "If you don't want to be presentable, we'll let you be married just the way you are."

Beneath the force of this argument, the girl began slowly to dry her tears.

"The trouble is," grumbled the Tyngall, as he ruefully eyed his bride-to-be, "you don't appreciate me. Here I've been mild and considerate and never so much as pressed a kiss upon you, when I could have taken you by force, if I'd been anything like the villains of the old story books. Of course, no one ever is like that nowadays. But I suppose you still prefer this upstart, Har—"

"Why shouldn't I prefer him? He's no upstart, either!" proclaimed Celia, beating her fists angrily against the chair.

"It's lucky for him he has no number," meditated the Tyngall. "My detectives searched for him everywhere in the Day Rooms, but couldn't find a trace of him. Of course, that was to be expected—the detectives rarely find a trace of anything. But if we had caught him,—well, by the blue thunders, he wouldn't have bothered us again!"

"You never will catch him!" challenged Celia. "He's too smart for you!"

"Smart? I don't know that word. Oh, you mean, tricky? Well, if ever I see him again, his tricks will get him nothing! He will regret the day when his father met his mother!"

Several minutes more went by while Celia, drying her tears, did her best to resign herself to the inevitable. If she was to be married anyhow, she reasoned, she might as well make a good appearance as a poor one.

BUT she could not permit herself to take the Tyngall's arm as the little gold-meshed door was opened and she entered the reception hall. She still looked tormented and strained; yet if there were any who noticed the tear-marks on her face, they thought these perfectly natural in one who was so soon to have the great happiness of marrying a Tyngall; and, besides, a bride so young and tender-looking was certain to evoke favor, particularly among the hardier and more susceptible sex.

To Celia's senses the scene was like a nightmare, with the crowds of people, the excited exclamations, the congratulations, the murmurs of awe and admiration, the glitter of bright lights, the glare of the omnipresent gold, and the atmosphere of formality that filled the great, elaborately outfitted hall. It seemed to her that she was living through some fearful dream when, at the Tyngall's side, she was marched to the center of the room while the crowd made way before her and a figure in a golden robe and golden headdress stood on a little platform with a gold-bound book, which he gravely opened. "For our text today," she thought she heard him proclaim, "let us take a passage from the twenty-second century sage Halperi. 'They that are united shall be blessed.' Surely, nothing could be more blessed than that mating now about to

be consummated, between the Tyngall of Tranerica and one whom, to judge hy appearances—"

The figure in the golden rohe, Celia afterwards remembered, cast a henevolent, almost an endearing smile at her. She also recalled that there was much more which he said, about the "duties of a Tyngalless" and the "continuation of the great dynasty of Spratt." But the next thing that she sharply recollected had nothing to do with the golden-rohed one, nor with the rolling phrases that slid from his tongue.

Snddenly—so suddenly that the guests had harely time to turn, and gasp in consternation—a huge door at the center of the room hurst open with a clattering sound. There came the rattling of steel; and a corps of mechanical guards, each of ten-foot stature, thumped into the room. While the guests, in terror, scattered before their advance, they strode toward the Tyngall, who gave one startled glance and turned to flee—only to rush straight into the arms of a second corps of mechanized giants, which had hroken in at another entrance.

"By the hlood of the Spratts! it's treason! hase treason!" he barely had time to cry. And then, while he struggled helplessly in the arms of an iron captor and the guests looked on with equal helplessness, the guards executed a rapid ahout-face and went clanking out, bearing with them the distracted Tyngall, whose cries could be heard even after he had disappeared, "Treason! Treason! By the hlood of the Spratts! it's treason! base treason!"

* * *

A month had gone hy. Harry stood side hy side with Celia in the Crystal Room, gazing out toward the dark towering masses of the Hives. One arm was around the girl's waist; his eyes had a whimsical sparkle, and there was something a little playful in his manner as he spoke:

"Well, dearest, how do you like being a Tyngalless? The Tyngalless of all Tranerica!"

"Seems I take to it just like a duck to water," she returned, looking up at him with a coy smile. "That is, considering who the Tyngall is."

"IT was a pretty close shave at that," he meditated, hrushing hack his heavy mop of hair, in which the red was reappearing beneath the hlack dye. "When I consider how nearly that Spratt got you—"

"I was simply electrified," she finished for him, with an admiring glance in his direction. "It was hreath-taking, the way you burst in upon us, after the mechanical guards carried off the old Tyngall. And then the way you ordered the guests around, with the guards to help you, and decided to let the wedding ceremonies go on—with yourself in Mr. Spratt's place! I don't think the Minister would have married us, if he hadn't heen so scared you could see him shivering."

"Well, he didn't have much choice, with the guards clattering all around him!" laughed Harry. "My friends the Cipher and the Lightning Bolt were in the radio room all the while, making sure everything was run properly. By the way, I'm expecting them here any minute. I'm going to appoint the Cipher Governor of South Tranerica. And the Lightning Bolt—I'll make him amhassador to Afasia."

Harry took a stride ahout the Crystal Room, and raised his arms in a gesture of exaltation. "It's great to be a Tyngall," he declared. "My followers—you know, the ex-prisoners—are established in every radio room on the continent. They say the land was never before ruled so efficiently or intelligently."

"And that's nothing to what you're

still going to do," Celia predicted, coming to him with a smile. "After all, aren't you glad, dearest, that we came to the twenty-fifth century?"

"It was the wisest act of our lives!" he returned, gathering her into his arms. And then, as he glanced down through the fifteen-hundred-foot gulf to the Hudson and out across the interminable black hulks of the Hives and knew that he was lord of this and of all Tranerica, he heaved a deep, thankful sigh. "If only our friends in the twentieth century could see us now!" he exclaimed. "Who would ever have thought we were born to be a Tyngall and a Tyngalless!"

Meanwhile, in the obscure depths more than a quarter of a mile below, an unimpressive little man with a stumpy frame, bald pate and puffy face, moved unnoticed amid the crowds in the Day Rooms. His toga, of a pale lavender like that of many other males, was not such as to attract attention; his eyes were eager, like those of a traveler in a strange land, who finds everything of interest; but his manner was just a little bewildered, as though he did not feel himself to be quite in his element. From time to time, when some one accosted him and inquired his number, he would reply meekly, "I have none, I'm sorry to say"—whereat he would turn and go wandering away again, like a ghost among the shades of Hades.

"After all, I'm not so badly off," he meditated, as he rambled among the lawny walks. "It was pretty decent of the new Tyngall to spare my life and send me down to the Day Rooms. Besides, no one recognizes me here. That's because they've taken my jeweled robe. But I was getting pretty much bored with ruling, anyhow. It's more interesting here. There's more variety. Besides—come to think of it—I was mighty lucky not having to marry that weepy woman. She'd have led me a devil's life. . . ."

"The only thing I'm sorry for," he went on, "is that my dimension machine was broken. I would have liked to experiment some more. Who knows? I might have projected myself forward to the twenty-seventh or twentieth-eight century. Of course, I would have had to avoid the barbarian twentieth and twenty-first. . . ."

AT this point his reveries were interrupted by a shout, "Tyngall! Oh, Tyngall! Hail Tyngall!"

Out of old habit, he was about to draw himself up stiff and erect, and look cold and official, as he always did when hailed; but the final word struck him like a chilling splash of water.

"Tyngall! Oh, Tyngall! Hail Tyngall Harry!" was borne to his ears, in an excited chorus. The cry was repeated, again and again; and swept onward by a burst of mob emotion, he found himself one of a multitude gathered before a signboard, where a mechanical worker nailed a printed notice:

"HIVITES OF TRANERICA," greetings! After decades of inactivity, the government has taken steps to remedy the unemployment problem. It is not known how many billions are out of work. But as fast as we are able, we are going to retire the mechanical workers from industry, and give their places to living men. Applications for the first hundred million positions may be made immediately. Blanks are obtainable in all the Day Rooms. Tranerica shall enjoy a New Deal!

"Heaven be praised!" muttered Hannibal Fairchild Spratt the Seventh, as he hastened away to secure an application blank. "For the first time in my life, I'll have a real job!"

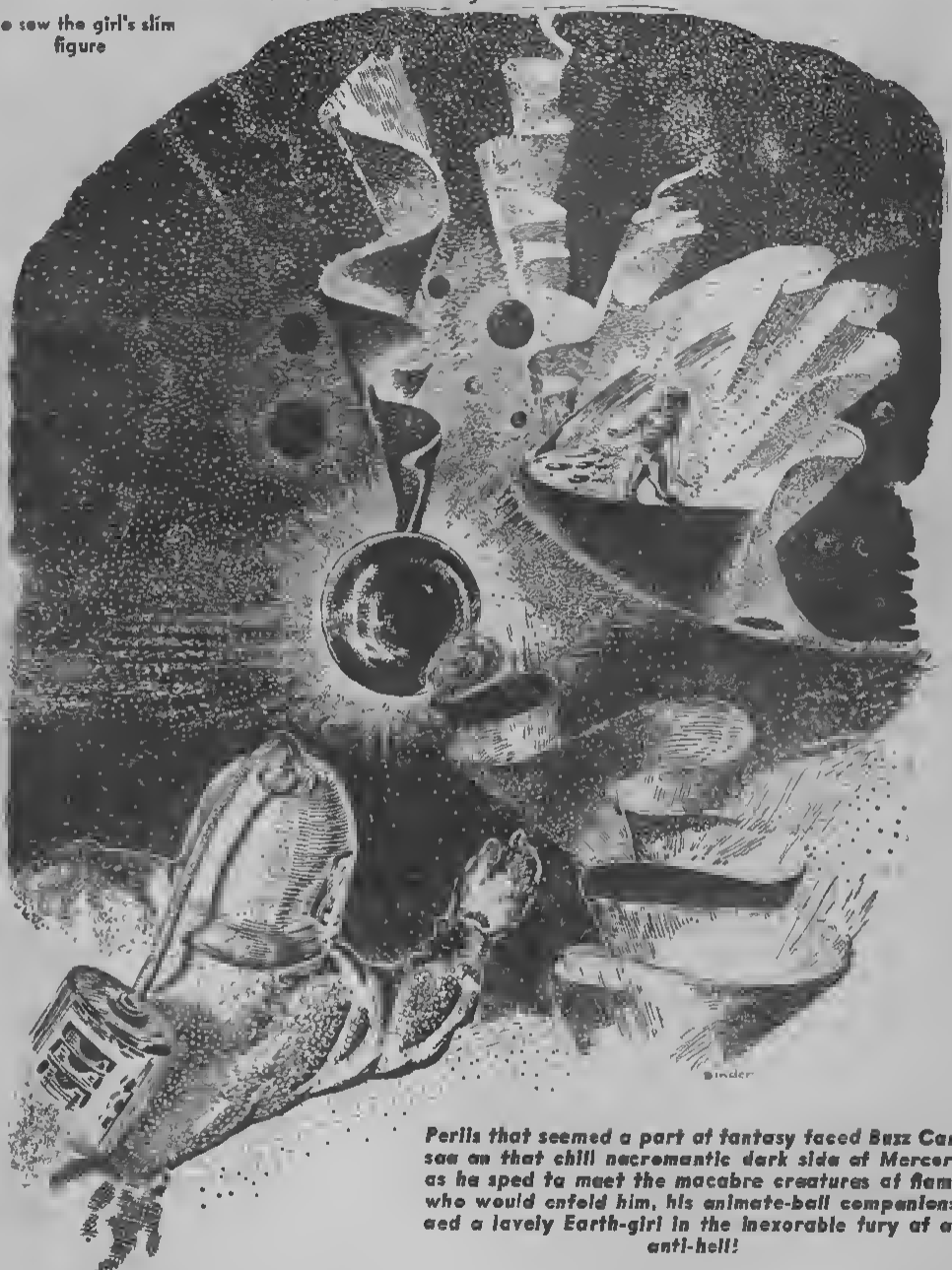
His heart beat with such a rush of joy, and there was such thankfulness within him, that he scarcely heard the shout of the multitude as it repeated, exultantly, "Hail Tyngall Harry!"

THE MERCURIAN MENACE

by NELSON S. BOND

Author of "The Message from the Void," etc.

He saw the girl's slim figure



Perils that seemed a part of fantasy faced Buzz Carson on that chill necromantic dark side of Mercury as he sped to meet the macabre creatures of flame who would enfold him, his animate-ball companions, and a lovely Earth-girl in the inexorable fury of an anti-hell!

"BUZZ" CARSON, chief space scout for Galactic Metals, Inc., tucked the wire mesh container under one arm and leaped lightly across the last of the jagged forty foot crevasses between him and his cruiser. Through his green quartzite headpiece, the *permalloy* hull shimmered weirdly in the relentless sunlight. As he approached the ship, a group of round, brown little shapes clustered about the airlock began to bounce and wriggle expectantly. Buzz grinned.

"The reception committee," he mut-

tered in amusement. "Carson of Galactic makes big hit with Mercurian marbies. Oh, well—Hey! Take it easy there, Rollie!"

One of the excited Rollies was bouncing up and down gleefully; joggling his tough, rubbery body against Carson's space suit in paroxysms of delighted anticipation. At the space scout's words he subsided into a trembling ball of hot leather; rolled smoothly and easily to the cruiser's entrance. Carson laid down his burden.

"All right, Rollies," he said good naturedly. "You know the rules around here. Which one of you is today's guest of honor?"

The Rollie nearest the airlock bounced up and down exuberantly. The others rolled back wistfully; spread circle-wise about the cruiser. Buzz took the tiny Mercurian in one hand.

"Okay," he grinned. "Come on in, pal, and get cool."

He took up his sample crate and pushed the button on the airlock. The other Rollies watched him disappear behind the wall of smooth metal, then swiftly rolled across the hard, sunbaked Mercurian plain to conceal themselves in ragged, shadowy caverns.

Inside the space-ship, as Buzz stripped himself of the cumbersome refrigerated suit that life on the innermost planet demanded, the guest Rollie tossed himself madly about the smooth, cool metal floor. Ballwise, he propelled himself around the room in giddy circles, his tough little body slap-slapping against the floor and walls in a frenzy of delight as he reveled in the delicious coolness of normal Earth temperature. Buzz chuckled as he watched.

"You're a nice little guy, Rollie," he said, "even if you do look like a hot basketball. How's for a nice, cool shower?"

The Rollie bounced crazily across the floor; bobbled about his bare feet.

"Wow! Beat it! You're *hot!*" exclaimed Carson. He grinned again. "All right, my spherical comrade, let's go sprinkle ourselves with some good Earth water." Together the Earthman and the creature from Mercury sought the luxury of the spaceship's shower-room.

BUZZ, reveling in a riot of foamy soapsuds and cool water, dimly became aware of another sound pounding through the hiss of the shower. A metallic hammering sound. As of someone knocking at the hull of the cruiser. He pulled a wry grin.

"Hearing things!" he muttered mirthlessly. "And no wonder, after two years alone on this blasted hotbox planet! Sorry, Rollie. No offense to you and your huddies. But—"

Again the sound reached his ears. This time it was unmistakable. There was someone—or something—pounding on the airlock! But what? Who? On the lonely planet of Mercury? Buzz frowned. If it was those darned Rollies—

Hastily he tossed a bath-towel about his loins and strode through the spaceship to the airlock. He paused near his workbench to pick up a metal meter-stick, then pushed the lever that operated the lock from the inside. The airlock wheezed and hissed; swung slowly open. Buzz stepped forward angrily.

"I told you fellows," he began impatiently, "you could only come in here one at a time. I've got half a notion to—"

His mouth, stopped in midsentence, became a round O of astonishment. The figure standing before him was that of a human! What was more—a *girl* human! Buzz gulped and turned brick-red; suddenly conscious of his scanty bath-towel.

"Whoa! Hold everything!" he gasped. "Come on in and sit down. I'll be right back!" Clutching the towel about him desperately, he fled across the floor to the shower-room. To the great disgust of the placid Rollie, he snapped off the water, flung himself into his clothing, and rushed back to his visitor. The Rollie trailed after him, dispiritedly oozing cold water from the deepset pores of his tough hide.

His guest had divested herself of her heavy space armor, and was lounging now in the light, graceful blouse and shorts favored for Earth summerwear. Her hair was a rich and warm chestnut bordering on auburn; her eyes, cool and amused, were like the cloudless skies above Mars. About her slightly wide, deliciously curved mouth, there hovered a faint smile. She rose and extended an arm in the universal Earth sign of greeting.

"Hello, exile," she smiled. "Surprised to see me, weren't you? Or do you always greet your visitors with a meterstick in one hand?"

"Y-yes," stammered Carson. "I mean—oh, no! Of course not! I thought you were a Rollie. I mean—I thought the Rollies were you. Oh, shucks! What I mean is, I've been out here two years without seeing an Earthling, and—"

The girl frowned momentarily; her keen blue eyes suspicious.

"Two years, you say?"

Buzz caught that studying gaze and grinned. "Don't be alarmed. I'm not space-cuckoo—if that's what you're wondering. It was just the shock of actually seeing another human being that upset me for a minute. And there *were* a flock of Rollies outside just before you came."

"Rollies? What are Rollies?"

"That's my own name for them," Buzz explained. "They are the natives of this section of Mercury. Maybe the only natives. Here, I'll show you one —" He turned and called to his Mercurian visitor, who had rolled comfortably under the electric refrigerator in the galley. "Hey, Rollie! Come on out and meet an Earth gal!"

THE "Earth gal" watched in wide-eyed amazement as the wet blob of leather rolled pleasantly across the room, rolled experimentally around her sandalled feet, then bounced gravely up and down as though to acknowledge the introduction. Buzz patted the tiny Mercurian and pushed him gently toward the galley passage. The Rollie spun swiftly, then whisked to his lair beneath the refrigerator.

"That's a Rollie," explained Carson. "Tough little footballs—but friendly. The only possible form of animal life that could exist here on the sunside of Mercury. The mean daily temperature here is 450 degrees Fahrenheit—and it's always day, since this side of the planet always faces the sun.

"The Rollies' leathery hides protect them from the terrific heat of the sun, and their shape allows them to travel safely over Mercury's rocky, pitted surface. And do they love coolness! I've been letting them visit me, one at a time, ever since I landed here. Give them a cold shower and you've won a friend for life."

"But—but he seemed to understand what you said?"

"Sure. Rollies understand every word you say. Some sort of telepathy, I guess. And they're intelligent little creatures. But since they have no vocal organs, they can't talk back. If it weren't for that, they'd be darned good company. But say—who are you? Where did you come from? And where's your spaceship?"

"One at a time, please," laughed the girl. "First of all, I'm Jeryl Morrow, ore products investigator for Galactic

Metals, sent out here to get your report. I arrived a half hour ago, Earth time. Landed as near as I could to your cruiser, which I spotted from the strato, and walked over."

"You know who I am, then?"

"Naturally. I know all about you—except what you have learned since you took over this station. That's what the company wants me to find out. Your term is over next year, and they'd like to have everything shipshape for the next Mercurian scout."

"Suits me fine," said Buzz cheerfully. "You can't imagine how good a glimpse of old Mother Earth would look to me right now. Seas and clouds and snow. And seasons. And night! Oh, boy! To see the sun go down for a change, and watch the sky grow dark. I've almost forgotten what the night looks like."

"That's strange! You must have seen plenty of night over on the dark side of Mercury."

"The *dark* side?" Carson stared at the investigator in amazement; then slowly shook his head. "No ma'am! Not Mr. Carson, lady. He stays away from the dark side of Mercury!"

"I'm not sure I understand you," said the girl slowly. "You mean to say that you've made no investigations whatsoever on the dark side?"

"My dear young lady," said Buzz seriously, "there are some things that even a space scout doesn't go out of his way to meet. I mean those things which don't concern him. Those things that got Henderson and Frizell. The things that destroyed Galactic's dark-side station in two weeks without even leaving a trace behind. The things that flicker through the twilight zone when you're walking near the border."

"Do you mean you're—afraid!" demanded the girl.

"Afraid? Sister, I'm scared stiff! Absolutely petrified. Don't look so surprised. After all, there's enough raw ore here on the sunside of Mercury to keep Galactic supplied for three centuries. Why should I, or any other man, tempt fate by going right into the lair of the flame-folk?"

"That's not the point," said Jeryl carefully. "The point is that your job is to study the ores of Mercury for Galactic; not to spend two solid years surveying one half of the planet. You *must* let me have a report on the dark-side metals."

"LISTEN," said Carson impatiently, "you're talking through your helmet! I have detailed reports on all of habitable Mercury. I have samples and analyses of every kind of metal that crops out of these rough hills and plains. I have assay fragments of gold, silver, platinum, iridium, tellium from the sun side. It stands to reason that the rest of the planet is the same. But I'll take that for granted. I'm not going over the border into the dark side for any man—or for any girl!"

Jeryl Morrow rose stiffly.

"Mr. Carson," she said coldly, "I've tried to be nice about this. But you've forced my position with your ridiculous attitude. Now listen carefully. *I must have a dark-side report!* You may consider that an order!"

Carson rose, his cheeks flaming.

"I always knew," he said angrily, "that a woman in space was a woman without brains! Now *you* listen! If you want a dark-side report, you can get it yourself. And—you may consider that a refusal!"

The girl's eyes traveled over Carson's well-knit body slowly. When she spoke, her voice was mocking.

"Yellow, eh? I didn't think any one man could be all they told me, back on Earth, that you were. All right, Mr. Carson—I will get that report myself. I'll show you whether spacewomen are

fools. And when I get back to headquarters, we'll see what Galactic has to say about its great ace scout."

Carson's jaw set in a grim line.

"If you know when you're well off," he ground out, "you'll stay here—where it's safe!"

"I'll go where I choose," said the girl firmly. She stepped into her space armor deftly; stood before Carson. Her voice was metallic through the communication unit of her helmet. "You'll not change your mind?"

"No!"

"Very well, then," Jeryl Morrow strode to the airlock. "You might turn on your short wave to 9.56. I'm going into the dark side to establish a research base. I'll let you know how I'm making out. Goodbye, Mr. Carson!" Once more the airlock wheezed asthmatically as she stepped into it. Buzz took a swift step forward.

"Miss Morrow!" he cried. But there was no answer. The outer port clanged shut. Grimly, Buzz strode to his instrument panel; snapped on the short-wave radio. A slightly chilled ball rolled lazily across the floor and nestled at his feet. The Rollie.

"Oh, you!" demanded Carson fiercely. "Are you all one sex? Or are there female Rollies, too?"

The Rollie wriggled fretfully. Buzz sighed.

"Well—I guess it doesn't make any difference," he said. "A gal Rollie wouldn't have red hair anyway. Or a rotten disposition. Like *you*, I mean—" he suddenly shouted in the general direction of the radio. The radio hummed and spluttered. Then, as if in answer to his comment, he heard the cool voice of Jeryl Morrow.

"Are you tuned in, Mr. Carson? Very well. Leave your dials where they are. I'm taking off now for the dark side." There came a light, taunting laugh. "To see your bogeymen. You'll hear from me later. . . ."

"Hey! For goodness sakes—stop it! What the—!"

Buzz stared in shocked bewilderment. The Rollie seemed to have suddenly gone mad. No longer quiet and relaxed, the tiny Mercurian began to pound up and down before him in a mad tattoo.

Tap-tap-tap! his leathery little body sounded on the hard metal floor. Tap-tap-tap!

CARSON stared. Then snddenly he recognized that there was more than mere chance; there was some intended meaning behind the frenzied activity of the speechless hall. Something had excited the little visitor to an unusual extent. Could it be the radio? Something Jeryl had said? About the dark side?

Swiftly he whirled on the bouncing Mercurian.

"Rollie—what is it? Something about the dark side you want to know?"

The Rollie lay quiet, quivering with suppressed excitement.

"Bounce once for 'yes' and twice for 'no'," ordered Buzz. "Now—is it about the dark side, Rollie?"

The Rollie bounced once emphatically; then suhsided into tense quiescence.

"Danger there?" continued Buzz frantically.

Again his little friend bounced a single loud tap.

"What kind of danger? From people—oh, darn it! Rollie, if you could only talk! Wait a minute. I have it! If I follow her, can I help? Will I be ahle to protect her?"

Tap-tap. Ominously.

"Then what . . . how . . . ?" Eagerly Carson clutched at a tenuous straw. "Can *you* help her, Rollie?"

A deliberate tap, followed hy a rapid tap-tap.

"Yes—No?" Buzz frowned. Then, "I see! Not you alone—hut you and your hrothers! Is that it?"

Breathlessly he watched as the Rollie tapped once. Then he hegan to throw himself into his space armor. The Rollie rolled eagerly to the airlock; waited there expectantly. Within seconds the two were standing on the hot, dry plain outside the cruiser. Shrilly Carson whistled. In answer to the Earthman's signal from a hundred rocky caverns in the stark desolation came swiftly rolling hrownish halls. Over huhhle and detritus, from crevice and cranny, the tiny Rollies tumhled and hounced their way to the space cruiser. They paused in a thickly strewn circle hefore the Earthman, wiggling curiously. Carson wet his lips. He felt silly, standing there talking to a group of hot little haskethalls, hut heneath his sense of the absurd was a stronger force. Fear.

"Rollies," he said, "something's wrong. I'm not sure I understand what it is—but your hrother here does. A girl from Earth, a newcomer here, has just gone over to the dark side of the planet."

A quivering shudder seemed to course through the leathery horde. Taut nerves tightened in Buzz.

"I understand that you Rollies are ahle to help her. Will you do it?"

There was a surging forward movement as the Rollies, with one accord, tossed toward him. Carson plunged the key that controlled the airlock. Hot hrown halls jiggled about his feet, crowding into the ship.

"Come on, then!" s h o u t e d Buzz. "Pile in! We're going after her. Into the dark side!"

There was a dreadful sort of jest in the way that cheerful voice spoke intermittently over the one-way radio. Standing hy the controls, Buzz ground his teeth helplessly as he listened to Jeryl's mocking taunts.

"—nearly through the mountains now, and it's too bad you're not with me, Carson. They are quite a sight as they flame, crimson and gold, in the hrilliant sun. I hope you'll find time to study *them* sometime. But perhaps they are too near the twilight zone to suit you—"

THE ship was throbbing with vihration; its usual stability disturbed hy the mad acceleration Carson was jamming through the rocket jets. The main tubes of the space cruiser were flaming spouts of fire in the Mercurian strato; the ship itself a flashing streak of silver arcing above the tiny metal planet. Great motors whined and groaned as Buzz shoved the control lever to its highest acceleration notch.

"—can see the twilight zone ahead now," continued the undisturbed voice. "Strange. I should have expected some sort of vegetation here. But there is none. And I can see a thin hlack line ahead now, Carson, with darkness hanging above and beyond it like a velvet curtain. That reminds me—you wanted to see the night again, didn't you? I see it now. Perhaps you should have come with me—"

Through the *perilens* Carson caught a glimpse of the small, rapidly moving spaceship. Her ship. Ahead of him and moving swiftly toward the dark-side boundary. A great exultation swept over him. He might make it! He might succeed in stopping her before she crossed over; grounded on that inhospitahle, macahre terrain. . . .

"—am turning off the refrigerating unit now, and switching on the heat. No hright sunshine here, Carson. It is growing quite dark—"

She had made it then! She was through the twilight zone. On the dark side!

"Damn you!" cried Carson to the radio. "Damn your beautiful, stuhborn jets! Turn around! Come back! Don't try to land there!"

"—but it isn't *entirely* dark—" There was an odd, strained note of hesitancy in the girl's voice. The Rollies, piled in heaps of spherical hrown heside Carson in the control room, quivered as a solid hody. One bounced, explosively, to the ceiling. "—there are strange little green flares moving through the blackness. Odd. A sort of St. Elmo's fire, I suppose. Or a sort of cold will-o'-the-wisp. At any rate, I understand what caused your fear of the 'flame folk,' Carson. But you were wrong. I can see them quite plainly now. They are not beings at all. Just a phenomenon of the cold—"

Carson groaned and tngged vainly at the already strained controls. Oh, for one more hurst of transcendent speed! All too well he knew those "green flares"! Knew what they could do, anyway. He had been a member of the party that had gone out to find out what had become of Henderson's ill-fated dark-side base. He had seen, from above, those seared black cicatrices on the bleak, rimy soil of the dark-side. Had seen—and shuddered. Had understood—and returned to the safety, light and warmth of the sun-side. If this girl landed her ship . . .

"Jeryl!" he cried. But even as he spoke, he knew his words were vain. She, too, was speaking from the radio.

"—am landing now," said that laughing voice. "I must sign off for a moment. I'll he with you later—"

Suddenly the cah of Carson's cruiser was thick with darkness. Through impenetrable black his fingers groped for the light switch; snapped it on. He, too, was through the twilight zone. He had reached the hlackness of the dark-side. But would he be too late? Swiftly he clicked on the search beam; swung its wide arc groundward, searching for Jeryl's ship.

One of the Rollies was bouncing against his legs insistently. He looked down. All of the others were herded hy the airlock, their massed brown bodies strangely comforting sights in this strange, frozen silence. Carson nodded his understanding. They wanted to he released instantly at the moment the other ship was sighted. He turned back to his controls; knuckles white on the propulsion rod.

THEN suddenly a loud scream tore through the narrow control room. Jeryl's voice raised in horror!

"Carson! Buzz! Help!" There was a moment of frying static, then, "Buzz —you were right! They *are* alive! The green things, I mean. I can see them through my *perilens,* clustering about me. Hundreds of them. They seemed to be gathering. Now they're moving toward the spaceship!

"And my controls won't work! Buzz —they've gone dead on me! The lights are out! Out! It's a dreadful sea of blackness. And those green flares moving toward my ship—"

Great beads of perspiration dripped coldly from Buzz Carson's forehead. His strong hands trembled on the propulsion rod. Helpless! Trapped by that damned green horde. But where? In the name of the Nine Planets—where?

His eyes, glued to the *perilens,* caught a fitful gleam of baleful green. Hastily he swung the ship toward the hideously glowing patch of color. It was she! It was the grounded ship—encircled hy the flame folk from the frigid hell of the dark-side.

Carson's hands, steel-tensed as the claws of a robot, swung the ship into a hovering circle. The flaming rocket-tubes choked and died suddenly as Carson swept down like a shrieking de-

mon of vengeance.

No time for a careful landing. Already the radio was spitting and fizzing with an excess of static; the words of the girl coming through fitfully. "—not afraid to die . . . hut . . . should have helieved what you told me . . . Buzz . . . if I had only—" Then the ground was a tangihle force rising up to smash at the ship. Recklessly, Buzz shot a staggering repulsion heam from the nose jet. The ship jolted, reeled . . . then settled to the ground with a grinding hump.

In a flash, Carson was at the airlock; his hand on the release lever. The door swung open. Then suddenly a tough, solid ohject struck him heavily on the hreast; howled him over like a ten-pin. One of the Rollies!

And Carson saw the meaning of this crude warning. This was *their* fight—not his! Dazedly he crawled back to the control room; focused the *perilens* on the ragged shelf of the Mercurian dark-side landscape.

Across a hleak and desolate frozen plain, not fifty feet distant from his own cruiser, was the other space ship. A dark, sullen mass; unlighted and grim. About it, circling in an ever-narrowing net, a host of the greenish flame-folk stood; their ghoulishly phosphorescent hodies flickering pallidly against the dreadful umhra. Tall as two men, they were. Slim, ever-changing wisps of light that glimmered like the cold fox-fire of distant Earth.

From their tractile hodies strange pseudopods of flame licked out again and again. Ghastly emanations that simulated the limhs of flesh-and-blood creatures. There was no recognizahle suhstance or shape that composed them. Only a constant flux of quavering motion, somehow baleful and threatening. Their light was a light that cast no gleam among them. It seemed self-contained. The light of ahsorption.

The unhroken circle that had surrounded the other ship was ruptured now. Some of the flame folk had noticed the new cruiser. Already a tiny group of the green flame-folk were moving across the metal plain to investigate. There was a quivering excitement in the creatures' fitful gleaming. A sort of greedy, licking hunger in their cold presence.

A CHILL of repugnance swept through Carson. Then he swung the *perilens* around to sight the airlock of his own ship.

Darkness! Black, deep, impenetrable darkness! Buzz gnawed his lips. Had the Rollies come out? Were they somewhere in that dismal void, organizing, forming their ranks for some strange warcraft? He could not see them anywhere. Those houncing, huhbling little spheres of friendliness—what had happened to them?

Then suddenly, amazingly, something happened! One of the green flame-folk, the nearest of the investigating party approaching Carson's ship, writhed as though in a convulsion of pain! Writhed into a towering spiral of greenish flame that twisted into the hlack sky—and disappeared!

And in its place another figure appeared. A flame of warm, ruhy light that pulsed and glowed with a fervor like—like that of an avenging host! Buzz gasped! It was impossible—hut it was true! This must he the work of the Rollies. The hattle was begun.

Another of the green flame-folk shot, rocketlike, to a streaming spiral of curling pain; quivered and collapsed into a glowing red flame. And another . . . and another! Suddenly there was panic amongst the handful of invaders, and like gaunt will-o'-the-wisps the few about Carson's cruiser swept hack to-

ward their fellows.

There was a congealing of the borde of green demons; a baleful conference of evil. Wavering tentacles of spirit light bovered about the dark-side inbabitants, and an ominous pulsating strength shuddered through their ranks. One of the green flares uncurled himself from around the prow of the girl's cruiser. Where he had embraced the spaceship, smooth metal was charred and blackened; burned deep in a channeled groove.

Jeryl's voice, suddenly bell-like and clear, spoke from the radio.

"Buzz! Your ship! I see it in my *perilens*. Then you came? But what's happening? The green things are going away. What are those red flames? Are they enemies, too? Or friends? Did you bring them?" There was a moment of silence, then the girl's voice broke suddenly with horror. "Buzz—my ship! It's been broken. Burned into! The air is leaking!"

Agonizedly, Carson waited for her next words. Cold sweat beaded his forehead; a clutching hand was at his throat.

"I'm putting my space suit on," came the voice once more. "I'm going to try to make it—through *them*—to your ship. If I fail—"

Tben Carson acted. Like a madman he tore toward the airlock; waited impatiently as the lock operated to loose him to the frozen metal plain. Rollies or no Rollies, be had to get into this fight, too. Jeryl could never get through that macabre green host alone.

He reached the plain outside. Thankfulness touched his heart that the gravity of Mercury was so slight. That sturdy Earth muscles, even hampered hy the leaden weight of a space suit, could carry one enormous distances at a single leap.

In the flood of the searchlight be saw the girl's slim figure stumble from the airlock of the other ship. He bounded toward ber. A wavering green light flickered toward him. He eluded its tactile fingers, scarcely knowing wby. Another step now. . . .

Then the greenish flare enveloped him for a fraction of an instant—and bis senses reeled! Pain, sbarp and indescribable, flooded him to the roots of every nerve. He was numb. Numb and cold with an unearthly coldness. His feet failed him. He fell forward on his face; drained of every ounce of energy.

A BLINDING flasb of color flamed before him. The brilliant, coruscating color of giant forces met in migbty conflict. Suddenly the coldness left him as bis green attacker left to join the rest of the green horde which, *en masse*, was advancing to meet the ruby-colored invaders.

Instantly the dismal landscape was lit with the ghastly flares of unearthly combat. Fulgurant streamers of fire were flung to the skies as the forces of the baleful flame-folk struck back against the strange necromancy of the Rollies! Pallid green and scintillant ruby met in beams of blinding energy; swayed and tossed like maddened fingers of ligbt. Shattered into dripping sparks of blazing color!

Here a gigantic green unit swallowed its reddish foe, gleamed strangely with an inexplicable color beyond the spectrum, and shimmered into caliginous gloom. There an omnipotent pillar of ruby fire wbirled like a gigantic spout of flame into and through tbe massed green horde; striking, absorbing, destroying all that stood in its path. From out of nowbere a flame of Red would emerge, darting, swift as ligbt, to the very beart of the fray.

Like a thousand ligbtnings the warriors from the Mercurian antipodes met, flamed and died in that titanic struggle.

And ever, inexorably, the pulsing glow of the ruby flames spread as the green borde dwindled. Doggedly, stubbornly, the dark-side demons fought at first. Then, as one by one of their fellows writhed into spires of stricken flame, died and emerged as red foes to turn upon their own brethren, the remaining few retreated until the battleground was clear of all save the ruby flames.

And as the last of the green horde disappeared into the black depths, Carson was on his feet again, stumbling and panting to the side of the girl. Stumbling because all about him, strewn like giant pods, were the inert leathery bodies of the Rollies. And about him, too, warm and protecting, were the flame-giants of ruby that the Rollies, somehow, had managed to loose. . . .

"Buzz!" Jeryl's glad cry was sweet in his ears, even distorted through the metallic eardrums of his helmet. Swiftly he gathered her into his arms. Together they moved toward the cruiser. A tear choked the girl's voice as they passed one of the tiny, rubbery balls.

"The Rollies," she said. "They saved us—but they lost their lives in doing it. And all because I was stubborn."

"But we did not lose our lives," said a quiet, gentle voice. "Our lives are eternal; indestructible. We are here."

Carson and the girl stared at each other; suddenly realizing the same thing. No voice had spoken to them. No *real* voice. A thought had entered their minds. And before them, slowly revolving, was one of the ruby flames that had conquered the green flame folk. From its glowing depths emanated the waves that came to the mass thoughts.

"Yes, this is our true form, Buzz Carson," continued the thought. "We are really as you see us now—creatures of positive electrical energy. Our foes and hated enemies were the green folk of the dark side—creatures of negative energy. Ours is the more progressive race; the more peace loving. That is why, many centuries ago, we developed for ourselves those 'bodies' in which we live on the sun-side of our world. Porous leathery bodies through which we can freely absorb the life-giving wealth of the sun.

"Of course, as 'Rollies'," the pulsating pillar continued whimsically, "we cannot do some of the things we used to do in the ancient days of our planet's grandeur. We cannot talk—or visit the planets as we used to centuries ago—"

Jeryl clutched Carson's arm.

"Visit other planets!" she cried. "Buzz—it's almost incredible, but it must be true! Remember what some of our old legends and religious books tell us? About strange visitors that came 'as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night'?"

CARSON whirled eagerly on the ruby entity. "Is that true? Were you the ones who—?"

But there was no answer. Slowly, easily, the ruby creature was seeping into the porous hide of one of the inert Rollies that lay strewn on the frigid plain. All about them, others of the red warriors were seeking their sun-side shells. Suddenly the plain was alive with a host of tiny, tossing brown bodies that rolled briskly toward the airlock. Friendly little creatures. Rollies once more. Buzz grinned.

"All right, boys," he shouted cheerfully, "if that's the way you want it to be—you're the boss! And from now on, the shower-room is open all day long!"

"Buzz—" Jeryl began hesitantly.

"Woman," Buzz Carson silenced her brusquely, "will you hurry up and get into the cruiser? I've been two long years alone on this planet—and I'll be darned if I can kiss you through a headpiece!"

MUTINEERS OF SPACE

THRILLING LONG NOVELETTE OF INTERPLANETARY RACKETEERS

by LLOYD ARTHUR ESHBACH



Each man gripped a grimly pointing rocket pistol. The four mutineers stood as though stunned

Behind these frail Terrestrials roared a volcano from the sulphur pits, and ruthless slave-masters of Jupiter—while 550,000,000 miles ahead was Max Bredeur, head of Interplanetary Transport Lines, and the vicious racketeer of Uranian slave traffic who had sentenced them to this living hell!

FURTIVELY Alan Sarett peered through the heavy murk of the Jovian prison pit. A cloud of yellow steam writhed upward from the boiling spring at his feet, obscuring everything with a choking, sulphurous veil. He caught a hazy glimpse of Jon Cory, lank and raw-boned, stripped to the waist, toiling steadily on the opposite bank of the pool. Then a shrill, peremptory note came from the throat of the Jovian guard, and a wire-thin tentacle lashed viciously across his naked back, cutting deep. Alan's face wrinkled like the snout of a snarling dog; and he bent over the hubbling spring, tearing savagely with a long, claw-tipped instrument at the crust of sulphur forming continuously on the lip of the caldron. A heap of the lemon yellow fragments lay behind him.

Through slitted lids he glared up at

the mighty figure of the Jovian, hatred burning in his eyes. Damned *sluur*—he'd pay for that—and soon! They'd planned everything—he and Cory and Parker, and the Uranian, Tull—and before many minutes passed, they'd hear the signal. . . . The signal, the roar of the supply ship from Io—and this *sluur* would boil in the sulphur pool, and they'd be heading for freedom! Freedom—and Max Brodeur!

His ears strained for the first sound of the supply ship's rockets, a tenseness creeping through him. And even as he labored, he watched the yellow-skinned guard, to be ready when the signal came. Formidable antagonists, these giant brutes with their tremendous muscles. It was no joke for two Terrestrials—or even a half dozen—to attack one of them. Ten feet above the obsidian surface of the Pit this *sluur* towered, his great, bulbous body supported by three mighty, multi-jointed limbs terminating in immense sucker-discs. His head, if it could be called a head, was merely an elongation of his body; and the bare expanse of flesh was broken only by a single huge eye, faceted like an insect's, and an enormous, toothless mouth. From the top of his head projected six long, wiry tentacles—and it was these that Alan feared most, for in them lay the strength of spring steel.

Suddenly Sarett stiffened, his fingers fiercely gripping the handle of his sulphur-hook. Far above a faint, penetrating whine cleft the heavy Jovian atmosphere, cutting down through the haze in a steadily mounting roar. The signal! He spun toward his guard—lashed out and up mightily with his hook, aiming at the gaping mouth like a crimson gash in the smooth, yellow face. And the blow landed! Blood, dark and viscous, spurted from a long, ragged wound.

A scream like the wail of a siren burst from the *sluur*, losing itself in the space ship's roar, and his tentacles, quivering with pain and wrath, swept toward Sarett. Alan tried to leap back out of reach, but in the terrific gravitational pull of the giant planet he could barely raise his feet from the ground. Coiling cinctures of crushing sinew seized legs, waist, throat, and he was whipped high into the air!

"Cory! Corp!" he gasped, and with a final desperate lunge he buried his sulphur-hook in the top of the Jovian's head. The clutch of the tentacles tightened convulsively; and Alan felt them sear into quivering flesh, felt the one about his throat grind deeper and deeper, obscuring his sight with a creeping blackness.

Consciousness was only a ghostly thread when he heard a shout rise above the dying roar of the supply ship, and the life-draining grip of the tentacles relaxed! The *sluur* shook under a hail of thudding blows—and abruptly Alan was hurled to the floor of the Pit. Agony crawled through every nerve; he wrenched the sulphur-laden air into his burning lungs with great, rasping gulps. He knew his mind was spinning toward the black, empty chasms of unconsciousness, and he struggled furiously to keep his senses.

Somehow, he found himself swaying on legs as weak as woven straw. A dozen feet away he saw the Jovian, a horrible monstrosity blotched with slow-flowing blood, crouching on widespread limbs, striving to ward off the gouging slashes of Cory's weapon. Abruptly he fell forward on the crimson ruin of his face—and a twitching tentacle wound itself around the Terrestrial! A single note of triumph shrilled from the dying monster—and he began to creep toward the boiling pool!

In wide-eyed horror Alan shuffled toward the struggling pair. Though the weakened *sluur* moved slowly, his own

pace seemed slower. Retrieving his fallen sulphur-hook without pausing, he pushed steadily ahead. They were fighting on the very brink of the spring now, Cory desperately striving to free himself. Then Alan reached them—and with a single mighty swing he drove his weapon through the bulging eye deep into the Jovian's brain!

AS Cory wrenched free, the *sluur* sagged in death. He teetered on the sulphur-crust for an instant, then slid over the edge—vanished in the depths of the churning expanse.

Panting heavily, the two men faced each other. Cory, angular, homely, six feet tall; Sarett, shorter by six inches, black haired, rather swarthy, a figure of stocky power. Both streaked and splashed with blood, their own and the Jovian's, from head to sandaled feet. As one their hands shot out, meeting in a strong, wordless clasp.

Cory broke the awkward silence. "A swell push—while it lasted," he said, grinning broadly. "And now I think we'd better blast off."

Sarett nodded. "Right. It'll take Parker and Tull longer to get to the wall, but they'll probably get rid of their *sluur* quicker than we did."

Like men on snow shoes they started across the Pit, sliding their feet over the glass-smooth surface. The muscles of their thighs were corded and rigid as they struggled ahead with laborious haste. Neither spoke; breath was too valuable to be expended in speech. And each was busy with his own thoughts—thoughts awakened by the freedom which seemed almost within reach.

Two months ago they had been brought to Jupiter on the convict ship, Sarett and Cory and Parker. Spacemasters all, in charge of three of the largest ITL cruisers, they had been convicted without trial on a charge of mutiny—convicted by order of Max Brodeur, President of the Interplanetary Transport Lines . . . Mutiny! Sarett's lip curled bitterly. That was a joke—a damned rotten joke. They had learned too much about the Uranian slave traffic, too much about those thousands of docile yet powerful *Elgae* being torn from their parent world to slave and die in the Mercutian radium mines. A racket operated by Brodeur himself!

And they'd *get* Brodeur! He was a big man in interplanetary affairs, a mythical figure of power none of them had ever seen, but they'd find him—and burn him!

"Almost there," Cory grunted, gesturing through the murk toward a high, gleaming wall directly ahead. It towered almost thirty feet above them, its polished surface sloping inward at a sharp angle, a barrier that no convict had surmounted since the Pit had been created. In moments they stood beneath it, looking back over the way they had come.

They could see nothing—only the eternal fog like a vaporous monster writhing in its lair. A mist that concealed thousands of convict laborers, beings from every inhabited planet in the System. They were toiling beside those seething pools, seeking Jovian sulphur crystals, more valuable than gold since Dr. Martin Quigley's discovery of their marvelous ability to rejuvenate human life.

Alan glanced at Cory. He was squinting intently into the gloom, waiting. Sarett frowned. He hoped Parker and Tull would make it. They should be here soon—unless they had failed! And if they *had* failed—either of them—it meant death for the rest, death in a sulphur caldron. For only with the four was escape possible.

Cory spoke without turning his head. "Wonder what it is that Tull plans to spring. You remember—he mentioned

it last sleep period. Something to keep the Jovians occupied."

Sarett shrugged. "I don't know any more than you do. But it's hound to be something good, for that Uranian knows things—like every other high-born memher of his race. And he's in this to win." If anything, Tull's grievance was greater than their own, for Brodeur's emissaries had tried to capture him with some of the *Elgae;* and because he had killed a dozen of his would-be captors, and had escaped, they had sent him here on a faked charge.

Ahruptly Cory gripped Alan's arm, and he held his hreath. There was a faint, slithering sound out there in the murk. If it were a Jovian—but it wasn't. The huge frame of Lief Parker hulked large before them, bloody, unsightly, sliding slowly forward like a swimmer struggling against a powerful undercurrent. He was alone.

A hoarse whisper reached them. "Sarett—Cory—is that you?"

"Yeah," Cory answered. "Where's Tull?"

Parker didn't reply till he joined them at the base of the wall. "He'll be comin'," he said. "We had a little trouble. The *sluurs* must've suspected somethin', 'cause two of 'em jumped us. They're cookin' now—but it means we'll have to rush things. Tull is plantin' his little diversion; and I came ahead since he can travel a lot faster."

"What *is* this plan of Tull's?" Sarett demanded. "Cory and I've been wondering."

PARKER grinned with one side of his face, his eye closing in an hahitual squint. "Oh, it's pretty! Pretty! Y'see, hack home on Uranus, Tull is a chemist—an' a damn' good one. Since he's been here he's been workin' durin' sleep periods, usin' some of the dishes they feed us with—an' he's finally made an explosive out of the liquid in the pool. Don't ask me how—but he's done it. An' when I left, he was settin' the charge. It'll blow the floor all around there into bits, an' let hell come hoilin' through. An' while they feed aspirin to that headache, we'll hlast off!"

"Blow up the floor of the Pit!" Incredulously Cory repeated the words. "That'll he—hell—for the other men around here!"

"It *will* be hell," Sarett exclaimed, his dark face hard and grim. He could imagine the shattered shell of obsidian floating in a churning mass of boilIng sulphur—Jovians and convicts alike sinking into the scalding flood—could almost hear the curses, the screams. . . . Then he spoke again, his voice brittle as the sound of hreaking glass. "It's tough, hut we're not doing it just to escape. We're going to get Brodeur—if it takes the life of every damned convict in this stinking hole! What's the difference—a year in this air finishes a man anyway! A quick death is more merciful."

Cory nodded. "You're right," he said stonily.

There was a moment's silence, broken only hy the faint wailing of a distant *sluur;* then Sarett spoke in hrusque, businesslike tones. "Do I have it straight? Tull takes the bottom, since he's heaviest, higgest and strongest. You, Parker, get on Tull's shoulders; and Cory crawls up on you. Cory braces himself against the wall—and he catches me when Tull throws me up. I reach the top and crawl out. Right?"

"Okay!" Parker snapped. "An' then you get that supply boat—quick—an' drop it in here to pick us up."

"Yeah—and—" Cory's words were lost abruptly in a crackling roar that reverberated thunderously through the Pit. Tull's explosion.. A dull red flash, then silence. Another instant—and the

veil of murk before them was ripped to shreds hy a lurid flare whicb lashed up and up endlessly into the sky, like a mighty arm of flame reaching lnto space. In its wake came a second detonation, father of the flare—an indescribable *b-r-oooommm* like nothing the three had ever heard. The floor of the Pit rocked drunkenly, and a wave of vertigo swept over the crouching men.

"It set off a volcano!" Cory cried, his words a thin whisper in the tumult —words left hanging in midair as a cyclonic blast of sulpbur-laden smoke flung him and his companions hodily against the wall. The perilous rocking of the floor continued, in tempo with the belching of the new-born volcano. And now a shower of glowing sparks began to fall in a stinging hail.

Alan Sarett struggled painfully to his feet, his battered hody numbed with sbock. A few feet away Cory and Parker crawled erect, neither seriously injured.

Parker's mouth twisted in his one-sided grin. "Plenty to interest the Jovians," he shouted ahove the noise. "More than we figured on. Now if Tull—" He stopped short.

"Yeah," Cory concluded, "if Tull pulled through and we could get out of bere in a hurry, there wouldn't be much chance of pursuit. But it's a miracle if he escaped."

"Then miracles still happen!" Alan cried. "Here be comes!"

Outlined against a background of crimson flame, a massive figure strode ponderously toward them. Almost as tall as the Jovians, he looked like a crudely drawn caricature of a man with a paper-white skin. Powerful arms, dangling from a tremendous chest, swung pendulously at his sides. Physically he suggested the hrute—but his mighty cranium with its bigh, jutting *forehead belied the testimony of his* body.

"Not good—this 'ruption," he said jerkily in a cavernous bass. "It break plans. We get out—quick! This place not last long."

Instantly Parker sprang to his side. "Yeah—so let's pyramid."

Easily Tull swung the comparatively puny form of the six-foot-three Terrestrial to his shoulders. As he straightened, a particularly violent upheaval almost hurled him from his perch, but Tull's fingers about his ankles saved bim.

During a brief lull in the volcanic disturhance, the Uranian rumbled, "Now you, Cory." And the lanky Space-master joined Parker on Tull's broad shoulders. Giant fingers closed rigidly on Parker's ankles while Jon Cory stepped into the other's cupped hands—and in an instant he was teetering dizzily six feet below freedom. Reaching out, he steadied himself against the sloping wall. Now he was faced with the difficult task of turning about, in order to catch Alan Sarett. Somehow he managed it, and stood with sboulders hraced against the smooth expanse.

"Hurry!" be snapped. "I can't hold this forever!"

Alan Sarett stood before the Uranian with set face. His part in this little gymnastic exhihition was the most dangerous. He looked upward through the mist. Cory's shoulders seemed perilously small, and he was rocking back and forth. Alan's teeth clenched as he felt fingers of steel grasp his arms. A breathless upward rush—and Cory's long arms wrapped themselves about him in a desperate emhrace. An instant they tottered on the brink of collapse whlle Jon Cory strove mightily to hold a weight that, in Jupiter's gravity, was tremendous. And all grips held!

"One more step," Cory grunted into Sarett's ear, "and you're out!"

ALAN nodded jerkily, carefully mounting to Cory's shoulders. Directly above him was the lip of this damned Pit—almost within arm's reach—and he *could* reach it if he could stand up. Cory gripped his ankles now, and be straigbtened. He balanced himself, pressing against the wall. His hands curved eagerly around the edge.

He could reach it! But it was *smooth!* How could be expect to pull himself out with so little to support him! The ghost of a doubt floated in his mind—tben Parker's deep voice came up to him: "Make it, boy! Remember — Brodeur!" And with a mighty surge of strengtb through muscles that cracked with effort, Sarett pulled himself up—and over—out of the Pit!

With legs spread wide he peered about him. He saw no one. A half mile away wbere the Jovians entered and left the Pit, there would be a handful of guards and a few ITL men—hut they wouldn't molest him. He started toward the landing field.

Thick underbrush—the pale yellow, fleshy growth that covered all of temperate Jupiter—blocked his path. Alan moved through it with a slow, sliding shuffle. And even that dragging pace required tremendous effort, for the great gravity strove mightily to draw him flat against the surface, like a needle on the tip of a magnet. Volubly he cursed the entire planet. It would take an age to reach the supply ship at this rate—and down there in the Pit Cory and Parker and Tull might even now be sinking into a pool of lava. For the intermittent roar of the eruption had not abated in the slightest degree.

On he plodded, heart pounding, legs aching under a strain that was almost beyond endurance. Breathing was as difficult here as in the sulpburous air of the Pit; scoria and ashes from the volcano formed a cloud that cloaked everything with hot, stinging dust. But Sarett moved steadily onward, his shoulders hunched forward, his hands clenched hard at his sides.

The ship had landed little more than a quarter mile away, but the distance seemed endless to Alan. Yet be made it. Almost exhausted, he halted at last at the edge of the rocket-blasted clearing; leaned against an outcropping rock, resting, searching for a sign of life. He knew there were always men stationed about the ITL building on the opposite edge of the field, hut he hoped they would be inside. He saw no one.

Abruptly he sank to his knees and hands and left the shelter of the leathery underbrush. In that position there was less chance of his being seen. Slowly he crept across the blackened clearing toward the spherical supply ship.

He was less than twenty feet from the craft when he heard a heavy hollow rumble like the pounding of many giant feet. He straightened up, glanced in the direction of the Pit—and saw a horde of *sluurs* sweeping over the undergrowth, fleeing from the horrors of the eruption. Their many-jointed legs carried them over the ground with amazing speed despite their vast bulk. They had almost reached the clearing. Now they saw the Terrestrial and a discordant chorus burst from their slits of mouths.

Dread swept over Alan Sarett. If they reached the space ship before he did, they'd stamp him into the ground! And the three in the Pit—they'd burn in a lake of lava! The blood drained from his face. His lips drew taut over clenched teeth.

Quickly he rose . . . and with greater strength than he knew he possessed, with a sudden, superhuman effort that centered all his power in his whitely corded legs, he *ran* to the supply ship, leaped inside, and slid shut the ponderous airlock! Then he sank into an

exhausted, sweating, inert heap just inside the door.

Moments later he staggered erect. There might be men of the ITL within this craft. He listened. There was no sound save his own barsh breathing and the muffled roar from the Pit. He crossed the vacuum chamber to the inner wall of the ship. He closed the second door behind him. Stealthily be slid along the metal corridor to where he knew the control room must be. The door was closed; it slid slowly aside as he pressed against it. He peered through the crack—then flung the door wide. There was no one in the room. The ship was probably deserted; he knew from experience that space-men usually left their crafts for an hour or two immediately after landing, in order to stretch their legs on solid ground.

Eagerly Alan's fingers gripped a control lever, his eyes glancing automatically over the familiar array of knobs and dials and pointers. As he pressed a button that started an air purifier to clearing the atmosphere of its sulphur stench, and closed a switch that set in motion a gyro-gravitator, imparting to the craft an artificial gravity, elation surged through him at the feeling of power that was his with the controls of a space ship again in his hands.

THE lever moved down a single notch, and into the rocket chambers flowed vaporized fuel; a second notch, and the craft trembled with the slow release of power; a third, and she rose gently into the air. Sarett switched on the bank of screens which curved before him, each of its five facets presenting a different view of his surroundings. Below him he saw the Jovian horde scattering wildly to escape the deluge of fire from the rocket vents; he saw another *sluur* rushing from the ITL building, carrying a Terrestrial official in its tentacles, the latter waving frantic objections. Alan grinned and sent the ship darting upward with another notch of power—upward and northward where the light of the Pit crimsoned the smoky yellow sky.

In an instant he was high above the great abyss, skillful manipulation of the controls holding the sphere almost stationary in midair. Anxiety gripped him at what he saw, and he began sinking rapidly. The prison pit was a wide, wide hollow brimming with smoke and flame. Liquid lava, an angry, lurid red, bubbled and surged and swept about everywhere like whirlpools of hell, spouting coiling clouds of yellow-white smoke. Here and there a darker spot was silhouetted against the crimson, an island of solidity in a flaming sea—but they were pitifully few. A sudden qualm of conscience stabbed him when he thought that in part he was responsible for this—but memory of Max Brodeur and of the tortures he had experienced down there froze his face into stern implacability.

Heading toward a vaguely familiar strip of land under the southern wall, he sank lower and lower. And suddenly he saw a group of human figures frantically waving, among them the giant, Tull.

With all his skill he lowered the ship to a surface that bucked and swayed like the liquid mass beneath it. As he switched off power, he pulled back a lever which opened both portals of the airlock. His eyes turned mechanically toward the screens for a final glance about, and he gasped. Not only were Cory, Parker, and Tull pushing toward the ship; behind them came a score of other convicts!

Furiously Sarett rushed from the room. Those maddened creatures—many of them the scum of the System—if they took possession of the space ship, it would mean disaster! He reached the entrance; Tull was already there.

The Uranian stood with his back to the airlock, crouching like a boxer. Now Cory and Parker joined him. The oncoming horde hesitated before the menacing three, and came to a straggling halt.

"No pass," Tull rumbled ominously. "Ship too small. You stay here!"

A howl rose from terror-parched throats, and a hurly brute with the thick body and bestial face of a Venerian halfcaste roared a foul curse.

"C'mon, yuh *crimps*," he snarled. "They can't stop us!"

At that instant a great slab of the obsidian floor broke away with a sickening lurch and vanished into the boiling lava almost at their feet. The mob swept forward in a wild surge of animal terror.

Tull met them with a sweeping, crushing attack of his incredibly long arms, hurling the leaders backward upon those behind them.

"Inside, Cory, Parker!" the giant roared. "Quick!" He sent them reeling toward the supply ship, and they dragged themselves hastily into the airlock.

"Come on, Tull!" Sarett shouted. "We've got to go!"

Tull, holding the convicts back like the frothing beasts they resembled, roared over his shoulder:

"You go! Me hold these. Go—get Brodeur!"

Even as the three Terrestrials shouted frantic protest, a single athletic figure darted suddenly from the mass, straining like a sprinter, and leaped, as Sarett had done, into the airlock!

Tull took a step after him, then as a triumphant howl rose from the mob, he swung furiously about. Parker struck viciously at the intruder; then their bodies crashed together and they clinched in a mighty struggle. Cory and Sarett, seeing a churning wall of redly glowing magma rolling toward them, hastened to the control room. Seconds counted now!

For an endless moment everything seemed to pause in stunned paralysis—then with an awful roar the entire strip of obsidian broke away from the wall! The space ship reeled sickeningly, rolling Parker and his combatant back into the corridor—and at that instant the airlock clanged shut, and the craft leaped toward the safety of the sky!

In the control room Alan thought he heard a chorus of screams blend into one spine-chilling sound that swiftly faded into silence. "God!" he said—and it was not a curse.

Cory spoke softly. "It's tough to leave Tull like that, Sarett, but it'd be a damn' sight worse to let him kick in for nothing!"

ALAN SARETT stood motionless at the control bank of the supply-ship *Minerva*, staring into the telescreens. His eyes followed the green disc of Jupiter, watching it shrink into a blur of light, till it joined the stars as a point of radiance in the black mosaic of space. At last he faced the center of the room.

Lief Parker, grinning his one-sided grin, gestured toward a motionless figure on the floor, then slowly caressed his knuckles.

"Well," he demanded, "what'll we do with this egg? Smash his shell, or put 'im in cold storage?" He eyed a metal-screened porthole thoughtfully. "He'll be—safe—out there!"

Cory shook his head. "Why do anything with him? At least, let's give him a chance to talk. Hell—you can't blame him for trying to blast out of that damned Pit! We'd 've done the same thing."

Sarett nodded. "You're right, Cory. The four of us were in the same tight spot—and he took the only way out. If he's the right kind, and plays a

square game, I say he should have his chance."

Parker grunted morosely. "Majority rules, o' course—though I still think I'm right. But, since you insist, let's wake him up an' let 'im broadcast."

Minutes later the stranger opened his eyes. The three Space-masters stood over him, motionless, silent, faces expressionless. He arose slowly, his keen gaze shifting from one to the other. He surveyed them narrowly, a hint of hostility creeping into the set of his mouth to be banished instantly. Then he smiled, a smile that went no deeper than his lips. And his voice as he spoke bore a hint of arrogance.

"I certainly appreciate your reception," he said. "Nice of you to pull me out of that mess back there. If you had come a minute later, I would be a cinder." He paused, inspecting the three with an air that bordered on insolence.

"Switch off the funny stuff," Parker growled, "or you'll be breathin' some damned thin air outside that porthole! C'mon—let's have some dope about yourself!"

The other met Parker's truculent glare with a look of unperturbed calm, then shrugged. "Very well," he agreed. "My name is Jones—Walter Jones. Second-class space pilot just out of training school. Got caught doing a little private smuggling—and Max Brodeur had me sent to the Pit! And who are you?"

Sarett answered. "We were ITL Space-masters, each in command of a cruiser." He introduced himself, Cory, Parker. "Each of us, working alone, discovered that Max Brodeur, big boss of the ITL, crusader against unfair exploitation of the System's weaker races—that Max Brodeur, the damned racketeer, is the power behind the Uranian slave traffic, and the contraband working of the Mercutian radium mines!" He smiled grimly. "We made the mistake of trying to do something about it—and we wound up in—hell!"

The other's eyes widened. "Brodeur—behind that! Why that seems impossible—"

"But it isn't!" Parker snapped. "And now we're out to get him! An' we'll be gettin' him, see? An' he'll pay plenty!"

Cory eyed Jones quizzically. "You said Brodeur had you sent to the Pit. Maybe you'd want to join us—"

"No maybe about it!" Jones exclaimed. "Brodeur was responsible for my spell in that sulphur-hole—and I'd like nothing better than to see him get what he deserves. If I may join you, I think I can be of some help, for I know Venus. I received my pilot training in the school in Terra City where Brodeur has his headquarters."

After a few minutes further discussion, Walter Jones became the fourth member of the little party. Big Lief Parker, distrustful to the last, made one final statement:

"Get this, Jones, an' get it good! If we catch you in anythin' shady—it'll be the last thing you'll ever do—anywhere!"

Jones smiled thinly. "You won't catch me in anything shady, Parker. Of that you may be certain."

An hour later, minus the grime and gore of their fight in the Pit, and clad in ITL uniforms found in the ship's supplies, Sarett, Cory, and Parker leaned over the space-chart, studying their position in the heavens. Jones was at the controls a few feet away.

"Doesn't look promising, does it?" Cory remarked.

Parker scowled and pointed toward the space chart. "Promising? There's Jupiter — about four hundred and eighty million miles from the sun. And over here's Venus, sixty-seven million miles from the other side of the sun.

That means we have to cover close to five hundred an' fifty million miles of space! An' there's not enough fuel in this little tank to take us a quarter the distance!"

"And we can't stop at any supply base for more fuel," Cory added.

PARKER grunted disdainfully. "An' even if we had enough fuel, it would take a crazy amount of time to make it at the rate we're goin'. There's only one thing to do—we'll have to get a bigger, faster boat."

"And I can tell you how we can do it," Sarett said slowly. He paused thoughtfully while Cory and Parker waited. Jones looked up from the controls.

"It's simple," Alan continued, "and it's feasible, too. Look." His finger traced a line across the space chart. "Here's the course of the Mars-Ganymede passenger-cruiser, *Vulcan*. I used to have that run—I know her schedule." His finger paused in its movement. "She's due to pass this point in another six hours. We're just about here—and we can easily be there before them, right in their course. Once there, we set off an automatic radio SOS. They'll have to stop and investigate—interplanetary law. And when they do, we'll take over the ship."

Parker laughed derisively. "Yeah—we'd threaten to chastise 'em severely if they didn't surrender! We're so well equipped to make 'em behave—armed to the gills an' all that."

"I mean it," Sarett insisted. "We can take the ship—and it shouldn't be very difficult. When they make a transfer from one boat to another—ITL boats, that is—they swing toward each other till their airlocks touch, and the openings are sealed together with the rubber collars that rim the 'locks. Isn't that right?" They nodded. "And after the transfer is made, both 'locks are sealed, the connection is broken, and the deserted ship is pulled along on a trailer cable. Right?"

"Sure," Cory grunted, "that's elementary. So what?"

"Simply this. First we get as close as possible to the *Vulcan's* orbit. Then we get into space suits, check them for leaks, and stop the air purifiers; after that we tap out about a quart of rocket fuel from the tanks, mix it with a little Martian *garra* oil, and set it afire. I needn't tell you what'll happen to anyone breathing the fumes. One whiff will paralyze them for an hour or two. . . . Well, when everything's set, we start the SOS signal. Then when they pick us up, and our airlock opens, and their airlock opens—tell me, will it work?"

Parker began pacing the floor excitedly. "Damned if it doesn't look feasible!" he exclaimed. "Crew, passengers, everybody knocked out. We'd only have to tie 'em up an' carry 'em into this tub. We could set 'em adrift or drag 'em after us, droppin' 'em some place where they'd be picked up. Or even better, we could stow 'em down below somewhere, 'cause they can't breathe hydro-garra fumes too long an' live." He stopped short. "Yeah—but what if the *Vulcan* doesn't stop?"

Sarett shrugged. "Then we'd be exactly where we are now. But they *will* stop. Space law demands it."

The cool voice of Jones came to them from the controls. "Why all the objections? The plan has a chance of succeeding—I don't think any of us have a better suggestion—so let's go!"

And so it was decided. After computing the probable position of the *Vulcan* with the utmost care, they sent the little supply ship roaring through space at top speed. Cory was at the controls. Several hours would elapse before they reached the passenger lane; while they waited, Parker prepared a hurried meal; Jones broke out the space

suits, and Sarett made ready the mixture of rocket fuel and *garra* oil. After they had eaten they ranged themselves before the tele-screens . . . waiting.

On and on the little craft sped. An hour passed—another—and suddenly Cory exclaimed:

"Almost there!"

With forward rocket vents he checked their pace and carefully jockeyed the *Minerva* into position. Behind him the others got busy. In less than ten minutes the stage was set. All four were clad in the clumsy balloon-like suits used for exposure in airless space, a dome of glass forming their head-gear. Individual radio transmitters and receivers in each suit made communication possible. The purifiers had been checked, and from a small-mouthed vessel in the middle of the control room rose barely visible clouds of lethal vapor. The televisor was sending an automatic SOS into the void.

Anxiously the four watched the screens, waiting for the sensitive instrument to pick up sight of the passenger cruiser. And it came—a speck of moving light against the silver-splashed backdrop of space.

Instantly Sarett sprang to the televisor. Plugging a wire into his speaker, he connected it with the instrument, switched off the automatic distress signal, and sent his own voice through the ether.

"First Lieutenant Freeman of supply ship *Minerva*. We're out of fuel; we've drifted far off our course. Our air purifiers are out of order and our supply of oxygen is exhausted. Can you take us aboard?" He waited—and a reply came.

"Pilot Turner of the *Vulcan*. We hear you, *Minerva*. By order of Space-master Stuart we are swinging alongside. Be ready to transfer."

"Check, *Vulcan*. We are ready." Alan broke contact, switched off the televisor, and turned to the others.

"Take it fast," he snapped grimly. "Speed is what we'll need."

TENSELY they watched the approaching cruiser, her sunward side gleaming like the head of a comet. Rocket blasts shot alternately from forward, rear, and lateral vents as the pilot eased the *Vulcan* closer to the smaller craft. In moments both spheres were flashing along at equal velocity, side by side.

Cory flung over the lever that opened the inner door of the airlock; it filled rapidly with the almost invisible vapor. Voiceless, the four crouched in the doorway. There was a brittle tension in the air, as though something tremendous were gathering its forces to shatter itself.

Now they heard the clash of metal against metal as giant cables flung out huge magnetized hooks which seized metal rings set in the *Minerva's* surface. There were other scraping sounds, the clamping of airlock to airlock. Then silence. And in another instant a sharp tapping on the metal door. At Sarett's nod, Parker thrust back a lever—and they were gazing along a wide passageway into the *Vulcan!*

Nine men crouched there, three of them officers, the other six men of the crew. And each gripped a grimly pointing rocket pistol!

For half a breath the four mutineers stood as though stunned. Their escape had been reported, Sarett thought swiftly—then too much happened too quickly for thought. The Space-master gesturing with his pistol, his lips moving in curt, unheard words; a hand leaping to his throat in sudden surprise and annoyance; his knees buckling! Even as he sagged floorward, Alan saw his eyes strike the glass encased face of Jones, saw those eyes widen with incredulous recognition—then he sank

limply on his face.

Seconds, it took; and others were falling, too startled to remember their weapons. The four charged swiftly toward the crumbling mass. One of the crew, still alert, whipped back a lever with lightning speed—the door shot shut—but Cory was quicker! His long body, darting ahead, leaped fully into the opening! And the ponderous metal disc crashed against him!

There was a horrible crunching sound, a raglike sagging of Cory's body—then a strange cessation of all motion. A stunned instant—and Sarett led the others in a leap toward the door. They flung their weight against it, thrusting it along its grooved track, its catch clicking into place. Cory slumped forward, and Sarett caught him. Gently he lowered him to the floor, ignorlng everything else.

"Cory—is it—are you badly burt?" He shook him gently, his face grim, his words only audihle to himself. "Cory—did—did they get you?"

Wearily the other's eyes opened. He smiled faintly, struggling to speak. Then Sarett saw his lips form the words:

"Get Brodeur!" And he died.

White with fury, a dull ache in his chest, Alan Sarett leaped erect and glared about. The floor was strewn with unconscious space-men. Parker and Jones were not in sight. Warily he moved along the hallway, stepping over the still bodies. He entered the main corridor. Here a man lay, his feet twisted awkwardly heneath him. There another—then a woman. He passed them with only a casual glance, his eyes searching for his two companions. Then he saw them, approaching rapidly.

When they were close enough, Parker spoke, his half-grin expressing great satisfaction. "They're all under—couldn't find a single one conscious." Then he saw Sarett's solemn face, and his own sobered. "Is it bad?"

"Cory's dead." Sarett's nostrils dilated, and bis eyes narrowed. "By damn—Brodeur will pay—for him and Tull!"

Solemnly Parker nodded. "We can't help Cory—hut we won't let 'im down. Two of us now—but we'll show that *crimp* that two's plenty!"

"Three, you mean," Jones said. "Don't forget me. We're all out to get Brodeur, you know."

Sarett and Parker snapped hard, suspicious glances at the other. Tbere seemed to be a sneer in his voice, but he met their scrutiny with a stare of bland innocence.

"Don't you think we'd better get those sleepers down below in the hold?" he asked. "I'd like to get out of this suit, and we've got to clear the air first."

"Yeah," Sarett growled. Parker only nodded. There were bitter words on his tongue, eager for expression, but he swallowed them.

In grim silence they set to work.

Morosely Alan Sarett and Lief Parker stared into the *Vulcan's* tele-screens. On all facets save one was the blackness of space, the hard twinkle of distant suns, and the softer gleam of scattered planets—in all hut one and in that lay the blinding Solar disc rimmed hy its awesome corona. A spectacular sight, sharp against the blackness. Not far away floated Mercury, like a polished copper coin, tiny world of unbearable heat and wealth beyond reckoning.

BUT the two Space-masters barely saw either body; their thoughts were of other things.

"The more I see of this Jones," Parker was saying, "tbe less I want to see of him."

Sarett frowned. "I know. He seems to be carrying a crooked cargo. Yet we can't condemn a man just because we don't like bim."

"The hell we can't!" Parker grunted. "I can!" He paused. "Ever since we put him in charge of the prisoners down helow, he's been walkin' around with that damned smirk on his loud speaker —an' I don't like it! I've watched him, an' everythin' seems okay, but I don't believe it is!" His lips set in sudden determination. "Hell—why talk about it? I'm goin' to lay him out where he *can't* do any damage."

"You'll do what, Mr. Parker?"

Parker and Sarett whirled at a suave voice behind them; stared into the steady muzzles of two rocket pistols! In the doorway stood the man who called himself Walter Jones, still smiling his shallow smile! A single curse escaped Parker; then he was silent.

"The little farce is over, gentlemen," Jones said amiably. "You've served your purpose quite well, and your freedom is now at an end. I've decided against killing you, however—unless you compel me to do so." He half turned, though his eyes and pistols did not waver.

"Come in, boys!"

In from the corridor strode two men in the garb of Officers—Spacemaster Stuart and one of his Lieutenants. Each held a weapon in one hand and a coil of rope in the other!

"Meet two of my assistants," Jones said. "Both are men of integrity and discretion, not to mention—"

"Hell!" Parker roared through his teeth, his throat corded with rage, "cut the comedy! If you want to say somethin', spill it! If you don't, shut up, an' *do* somethin'!"

Sarett remained silent, his narrowed eyes watching every move of the three before him.

The smile froze on Jones' face. "Very well," he said slowly. "Would it interest you to know that I am Max Brodeur?"

"Brodeur!" As one Sarett and Parker gasped the name. Alan's thoughts reeled. Brodeur—here! And these two space-men were his aides!

"Yes, Brodeur!" All suavity was gone from his voice now; it sounded a harsh monotone through the control room. "Max Brodeur in that hell-pit—because of your talking! Yes; your meddling caused an investigation—and they condemned me to the Pit for life! I should kill you—but I have a better idea. You were so kind as to bring us this close to Mercury—and that's where you'll spend the next six or eight months —if you live that long! Slaves in the radium mines! Perhaps you've heard how those mines affect the workers—radium burns—terrible sores—blindness—insanity. . . . I'm sure it will be far more satisfactory than merely killing you!

"Tie them up, boys!"

As the space-men approached, Sarett's thoughts raced wildly. To hurl himself at those ready pistols would be suicide, but to let them tie him would be just as certain, if slower, death. There was one chance—a desperate one—

He heard Brodeur's voice: "Turn around with your hands behind you!"

As he turned, a space-man grasped his wrists; he felt the rope circle them —and he leaped toward the controls he knew so well!

His body struck the master switch, wrenching it open. A rocket blast roared past him knifing into the control panel—and utter darkness fell upon the cruiser! The room roared into a bedlam. With alarmed cries the space-men fell back toward Brodeur; and a hail of fire poured over the spot where Sarett and Parker had been standing. But neither was there; with the darkness they had dropped; were rolling toward their three assailants.

The light of the pistols might have revealed their position, but everything

happened too rapidly. One moment they were standing passively; the next, in darkness, they were rolling across the floor; the third, they had seized the three and had hurled them from their feet! Brodeur crashed upon Sarett; Parker had tackled the other two.

Flaming rocket pistols whirled and clattered into blackness—and it was man to man in the dark!

With wild, fierce exultation Sarett flung his hands upward about the body, seeking a throat. The words flamed through his brain—*get Brodeur!* They were on their feet—reeled apart to close again instantly. The shock of their meeting was like the clap of hands.

Get Brodeur! Alan's lips curled wolfishly. This was the man who had ordered him to that Jovian hell! This, the Uranian slaver. This, the man responsible for the death of Cory, of Tull! Crimson battle-flame flared within him, tempered with a cold, cold fury. One hand ground into a thick shoulder; the other lashed heavily against a lean jaw.

GROWLING a curse, Brodeur grasped Alan's throat with both hands; and as Sarett wrenched free he felt a foot land heavily against his shin. Pain burned fiery hot through the outraged bone, and he wrapped his arms about Brodeur in red rage. A short arm jab glanced from his chin and he rocked back on his heels—then lunged forward again, into a clinch. Their legs coiled about each other, and they dropped to the floor. Over and over they rolled, striking blow after blow, gouging, kicking like two beasts, all reason gone from their struggle.

Suddenly they were on their feet again, striking blows through the darkness. Brodeur stumbled—and Alan caught him in a deadly grip that came unsought. One arm gripped him vise-like beneath the shoulders; the other hand thrust upward against his chin. Alan's fingers ground his lips against his teeth, and the leverage forced his head steadily backward. Dimly he heard Brodeur suck in a tortured breath; and an awful scream tore through the darkness. He eased the pressure for an instant—then he remembered Cory gasping out his life—and his muscles tightened grimly.

Brodeur wrapped his legs about Alan's body in a last desperate grip, fear of death pouring strength into his thighs. As the pressure grew, straining about him painfully, Sarett suddenly flung himself face downward upon the floor, his full weight striking the head and bent neck of Max Brodeur. There was a dull, nauseating snap, and he lay still.

Slowly Alan rose, panting hoarsely, reaction trembling in his limbs. He listened for sounds of Lief Parker and his two combatants; heard:

"C'mon—c'mon! Can't a guy get a decent fight in this corner o' space? Two of you—an' you break like eggs! . . . Hey, Alan, how you doin'?"

"It's—over," Alan answered. "Let's have a light." He groped toward the control panel; fumbled till he found the master switch; closed it.

Light flickered on in the chamber, uncertain light that wavered with the vibration of loose connections. It revealed three men lying awkwardly on the rocket blasted floor. One would never move again. Life still clung to the other two. . . . It revealed a control panel hopelessly etched and burned by a barrage of rocket blasts. Miraculously, two facets of the tele-screen had survived the holocaust; in one flamed an image of the sun. And it was spreading out, filling the screen—leaping up at them with frightful speed!

They were falling into the sun!

Instantly Sarett leaped to the controls, flung on checking rocket blasts—but there was no response. He tried

again—futilely. He shrugged. No sense in attempting to repair this ruin before him. He looked at Parker in silence.

Lief Parker's lips twisted in his one-sided grin, his eye half closing. "Looks had, eh? Well—we'll be goin' the way Tull an' Cory went—an' we're takin' that *crimp* with us!" He gestured toward the floor. "I'm satisfied."

Sarett scowled. "But those passengers and Space-men down below—" He stopped short, a slow smile appearing on his face. "Say—we must he slipping! The *Minerva!* What's to prevent our clearing her atmosphere, refueling her from the *Vulcan's* tank, and hlasting in under her power? It'll take a good while for us to fall forty-odd million miles—we'll have plenty of time to make the change."

Parker's grin spread itself to the other side of his mouth. "So *that's* what hrains are for!" he exclaimed.

"We'll land on the moon," Alan continued, "and radio the ITL headquarters on Earth ahout the *Vulcan*. And after that—well, we'll be outlawed, I suppose—"

Parker interrupted excitedly, "Say—I know what we'll do after that! We'll grab us one of those new interstellar ships from the shops on the moon, an' we'll roam the sky as we damn' please! We'll—hell, we'll see an' do plenty! Is it a go?"

Alan Sarett looked at the other panel of the tele-screen which had escaped the barrage of pistol fire. There were a million worlds out there, gleaming like eyes, glaring at him with a cold, challenging light. Worlds—with adventures enough for a million lifetimes. A warmth appeared on his face reflecting an inner glow. His hand shot out and gripped Parker's—hard.

"It's a go," he said.

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2. Identify the two largest stars.
3. What kind of a measure is an atmosphere? Give its value.
4. Where is the ecliptic?
5. What is a Geiger counter?
6. Describe polarized light.
7. What is an isotrope?
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9. What are caesium and indium?
10. What are anode, goede, cathode, and nematode?

(Answers to these questions on page 112)

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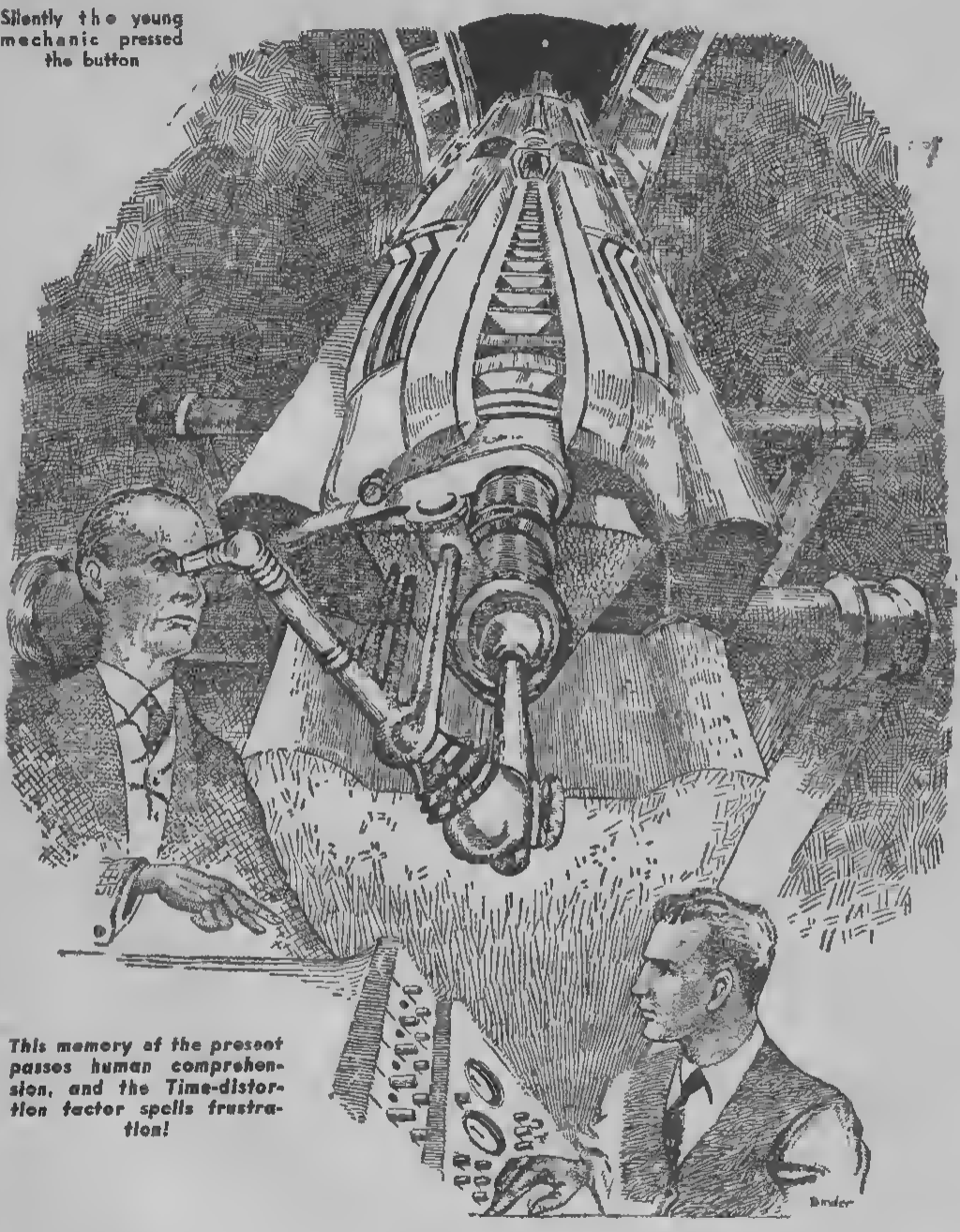
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THE MESSAGE FROM THE VOID

by HUBERT MAVITY



Silently the young mechanic pressed the button

This memory of the present passes human comprehension, and the Time-distortion factor spells frustration!

THE cold globe pulsed unevenly. In one corner of the great vaulted chamber a fretful generator vibrated through an ever-rising tonic sequence to still itself in the silence of ultra-sound. A dim filament flared into a point of sparkling light, and Dor Jan nodded briefly to his assistant.

Silently the young mechanic pressed a button on the towering metal banks before him. Gears meshed. Wires, strung high above, hummed with an er-

ratic vibration. Ozone crackled in the thin air, and a silent wave of power winged its way with the swiftness of light toward the pale green planet glowing in the darkness of the void. . . .

"Missing half your life. That's all there is to it!" declared the cheerful young man. "Nothing like a little home of your own with a plot of ground. 'Bring your friend out to dinner,' says my wife, *'we'll* show him what real home llfe is.' Great girl, my wife. You'll like her. You say you've never been out to this section before?"

"Never," answered the other. With distaste he noted the tidy monotony of the small suhurban community. Uniform stucco cottages; a thousand homes with a thousand similar tiny grass plots, a thousand cheery lights burning in a thousand windows for a thousand hushands to "come home to." His nostrils twitched with the crisping odor of a thousand chops frying on a thousand "Little Genius" gas ranges. . . .

"Yes sir, nothing like it!" boasted his host again. "Marry and settle down is what I always say. You'll see for yourself in a minute. My house is just around the corner and past—"

"—the gas station," finished the visitor.

"What? What's that?" The proud young hushand s t a r e d at his guest amazedly. "Hey, I thought you'd never been here before?"

"Why, I—I haven't!" stammered the visitor weakly. "I don't know *what* made me say that. I've never heen to Highland Corners hefore. But all of a sudden, somehow I felt as though I'd seen this section a long, long time ago. . . ."

IN the telescope chamber of the Flagstaff Observatory, Sir Humphrey Wimpole, R.A., shook his head as he argued with his American friend and colleague.

"No, Wallace," he said didactically, "I'm afraid we must discard your fanciful theory of life on other planets. If you'll forgive my saying so, it smacks too much of the romantic. Like those incredible yarns one reads in the science-fiction magazines. Why, the atmospheric c o n d i t i o n s, the lack of warmth and light, the shortage of oxygen—"

"But, Sir Humphrey," insisted Professor Wallace, "you must remember this. All life need not be exactly in the same form as ours. Different hodies, adapted to strange environments. A different form of reasoning, perhaps—"

"Tut, tut!" shrugged the British scientist impatiently. "All reasoning is hased on the same fundamentals. You know as well as I do that the Milan Ohservatory has been attempting to communicate with other planets for more than thiry years.

"Twenty-four hours a day they hroadcast a series of signals based on pure mathematics—the science which all logical creatures must recognize. The Law of the Squares. Two, followed hy a four. Three, followed hy a nine. Then a four—with a pause.

"Surely if there were intelligent creatures, say on Mars, they would understand the fundamental principle of this squaring factor—and send us a logical solution!"

He stopped ahruptly and passed a bewildered hand over his hroad face. The American leaped up.

"Sir Humphrey! What's w r o n g? Shall I get water?"

"No—nothing, thanks," faltered the visiting astronomer. "It's nothing at all. Just a peculiar sensation, such as we all experience occasionally. For an instant I felt that I had been through this same scene once . . . oh, a long time ago! And this is my first visit to America. Odd, isn't it?"

The magazine editor's look of amusement faded; gave way to a disturbed frown. He stared angrily at the manuscript in his hand, and pressed the buzzer on his desk.

"Miss Jenkins," he ordered, "send Murphy in here!"

Murphy entered, the broad grin on his face fading as he glimpsed the editor's expression.

"Murphy," growled the editor, "what in blazes is the idea of sending this story up here to me for reading?"

"Why—why, it's good!" stammered the first reader. "As a matter of fact, it's the best story I ever found in the unrush mail. And from an unknown, too. It shows a world of promise!"

"Good!" snorted the editor. "Of course it's good! It ought to be. It's the rankest kind of plagiarism. A direct steal from . . . from . . . well, I don't exactly remember where I read it before. But I did. I remember reading this story a long time ago. . . ."

The reciting student swayed suddenly; raised a hand to his forehead and shook his head. When he lowered it again the color had left his face. He stared at the professor with vaguely frightened eyes.

"Herr Toggman—" he whispered.

"Yes, Wilson?" The psychologist glanced at the boy curiously.

"I'm sorry," said the student, "but I've quite forgotten what question you asked me. I just had the most confused feeling. I felt as though I were suddenly repeating something I'd done a long, long time ago. Yet this is the first time we met in this classroom!"

THE professor smiled gently.

"A very common sensation, Wilson. We will discuss it at greater length later in this course. It happens to all men at some time or other. Every psychologist recognizes it, and has some theory to explain it. Henri Bergson calls it, 'the memory of the present.'

"Humans walking down strange streets, talking with new acquaintances, often stop short—believing they have done the same thing some time before. Some people claim the sensation has some significance, but that is palpably absurd. It is an utterly meaningless—"

In a control room more than 50,000,000 miles distant, Dor Jan removed the amplifying unit from his head. There was defeat in his large, many-faceted eyes as he gestured to his assistant. Once more a button was pressed. The crackling hum ceased. The generator whirred and died. The light of the pallid globe flickered wearily.

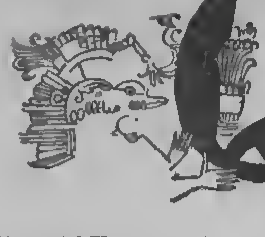
"Success, master?" The robot's assistant's thought came to the Martian astronomer's mind anxiously. Dor Jan grimaced.

"No. Failure again. I fear I must report to the Academy that the green planet definitely does *not* sustain life. I am certain that our signals reached there. Still, in more than 500 *rennai* of experiment we have received no answering signals from its cloudy obscurity.

"But surely . . . surely . . ." sighed the scientist, "if there were intelligent creatures, they would understand the fundamental principles of the Time-distortion factor—and send us the logical solution. . . ."

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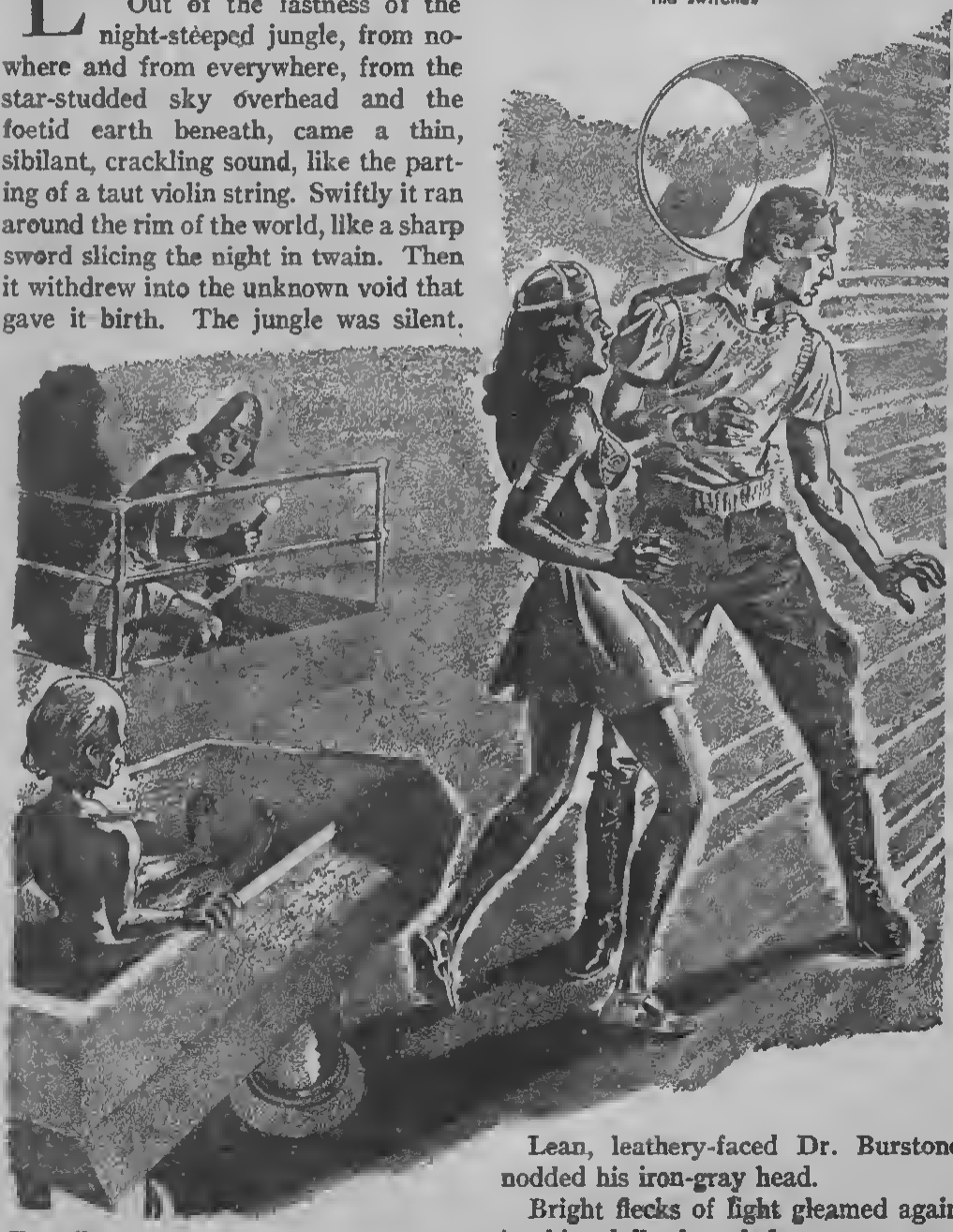
EXCITING LONG NOVELETTE

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

"LISTEN . . ."

Out of the fastness of the night-steeped jungle, from nowhere and from everywhere, from the star-studded sky overhead and the foetid earth beneath, came a thin, sibilant, crackling sound, like the parting of a taut violin string. Swiftly it ran around the rim of the world, like a sharp sword slicing the night in twain. Then it withdrew into the unknown void that gave it birth. The jungle was silent.

As he stumbled backward, Markle saw the old ethnologist reach up and grasp the switches



Too silent. . . .

Dick Markle dropped his pipe.

"There it is again," he whispered.

Lean, leathery-faced Dr. Burstone nodded his iron-gray head.

Bright flecks of light gleamed again in his dull, knowledge-weary eyes, eager lights, they were, as if the spirit of youth still burned in that old body.

ZIPANTORIC



Those two Americans were condemned to the wroth of incredible scientific devices by the great Moyan fire gods—for they had broshly violated the sonctity of that beautiful girl in the Zipantoric boll of flame!

"I heard it," he answered softly. "If you turn around, you'll see it."

Dick whirled. They were standing on top of the Pyramid of the Sun which formed a part of a far-flung colony of the ancient Mayas that they had discovered hidden and long deserted in the jungle of northern South America.

They were no longer alone on the flat-topped structure. An upright oval of golden fire as tall as a man was glowing on the western edge of the parapet. It was not flame in the meaning of the word when it is associated with com-

bustion, there was no suggestion of heat, the glow was not feeding on anything. It looked like a huge football standing on end and was about the same color. It apparently was electrical in nature, and slightly resembled hall lightning, except that no lightning ball ever known to man was a hundredth part as large as this.

DICK heard Burstone catch his breath. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw that the old ethnologist was trembling, yet Dick knew it was not from fear. The scientist did not know the meaning of that word.

"What is it?" be whispered.

"I don't know, lad," Burstone answered. "Don't move. Something is going to happen."

The golden huhhle of flame glowed more vividly. Its flame came from innumerable coruscating points that were visible yet did not illuminate the soft tropic darkness. It glowed like yellow witch-fire, like golden phosphorescence.

As they watched, the pin-points of light swirled, glimmered, raced in weird circles, coalesced, took on a vague outline. It looked like a television receiver that was out of phase with the transmitter; racing across the reception screen was an incoherent ramification of swirling white dots.

The lambent dots of ligbt moved into phase and almost disappeared, leaving only a thin bubble of golden ligbt.

Within that bubble of flame was a girl.

The golden light played over her lithe body, shimmered from the metal ornaments that covered her hreasts, flickered and danced from a light skirt that fell half-way to her knees, coalesced in the circle of metal that crossed ber forehead, met in an arch at the top of her small head, played lovingly through the midnight hair that cascaded over her sboulders. In ber right hand she beld a slender rod. Markle gasped. That rod was ornamented with the design of the Feathered Serpent, potent symbol among the prehistoric Mayans.

Dick started to move forward, but he felt Burstone's hand tighten on bis arm.

"Easy, Markle," the old scientist whispered, suppressed eagerness vibrating in his voice. "She is carrying the scepter of the Feathered Serpent. I think she is probably a priestess of Zipantoric."

"But what is it, a mirage?" the younger man questioned.

"I don't think so. I think that girl is alive, somewhere."

"How can she be alive? The Mayans mysteriously disappeared centuries ago."

"Perhaps, somewbere in this wilderness, a colony survived, and expanded their science to dizzy heigbts, outstripping, with their earlier start, the younger science of the Aryan races." Burstone's voice was alive with eagerness.

"Mayhe," he continued, "we are seeing the transmission of images to any desired spot without the necessity of cumbersome receiving apparatus. It sounds impossible but who knows that it is impossihle. Anything may be true. Watch . . ."

Imperiously, the girl in the golden bubble raised the rod. Sbe bad the haughty, regal bearing of a queen who was accustomed to commanding and having her commands obeyed.

If it was a mirage, a television projection, it was a remarkably realistic one. Dick could see the tiny ear-rings she wore in the lobes of her golden pink ears. He could see the deep hlack of her eyes, and the baughty look that was within them.

She raised the scepter, hrought down

the tip, so that it pointed at them. She could see them, she knew they were there!

Dick felt that the finger of fate was pointing at them. He had the feeling when her scepter pointed at him that he was being selected for some unguessed sacrifice to some unknown but potent deity. It had the appearance of a ritual, the selection of a victim.

The haughty look within her eyes confirmed this feeling.

He shook off Burstone's arm, stepped forward, his lithe six feet overshadowing the girl.

When he moved she seemed to become aware of his existence as an individual. The haughty look in her eyes faded, she looked at him as a girl may look at a man, and in her eyes was suddenly startled concern.

Dick's face was oddly pinched as he gazed at her. In his mind was turmoil, which coalesced in a nervous tension that was transmitted to his muscles. He did not will to act, he did not know where his muscles got their orders.

IGNORING Burstone's warning shout he leaped into that bubble of golden fire. A wave of sick agony shot through his body, the bubble collapsed, he held in his arms a writhing struggling girl.

She was real. He could feel her. What he had thought was a mirage was reality. The girl was alive, here.

Burstone's flashlight cut a cone of radiance through the night. The girl cowered away from it. She was afraid of that flashlight.

"Release her, lad," Burstone whispered.

Dick let his arms drop. She slipped out of his grasp, drew herself erect, stood proud and haughty before them, only tiny muscular tremors showing that she was frightened. She flinched, but she faced the flashlight. Its rays poured over her golden brown body.

She spoke. Markle, standing, beside her, saw her lips move and knew that he heard the words. At that moment it did not occur to him to think it strange that he knew what the words meant.

"Who dares to profane Zantha by touching her sacred body?"

"M a y a n!" ejaculated Burstone. "She is speaking Mayan. I recognize elements of it."

"But the meaning of her words," Markle interrupted. "I know what her words mean—in English! When she speaks, I see mental pictures . . . and I know what she is saying . . ."

He turned to the girl. "How . . ."

"You have the answer," she replied. "I make you see pictures in your mind, and you know what I am saying . . ."

"Mental telepathy!" B u r s t o n e gasped. "Brought to perfection."

"Can you understand us?" he asked the girl.

"Certainly. You and your comrade have strong minds and I can easily grasp your thought impulses."

"Who are you?" Burstone continued.

"I am Zantha, which means high priestess to . . ." She stopped, a glint of fear coming into her eyes. Burstone and Markle got a chaotic mental image of fright.

"Listen," she breathed. "Do you hear them?"

Dimly, vaguely, lost in the tropic night came a sobbing, rhythmic rumble. It was flung upward to the hot stars that throbbed through the hot darkness and flung by them back to earth. The two men listened. Like the beat of a gigantic heart, it pounded into their minds, rousing impulses buried deep under the culture of centuries. Each vaguely remembered things he had known in some long time as he listened to that sobbing murmur coming from afar through the jungle night. Thin ghosts rose to stalk through their minds,

specter wraiths from the long ago when the impossible happened on earth, and men believed it.

"Drums!" said Markle softly.

No other word was spoken. Out of Burstone's and Markle's minds, over nerve paths anciently rutted, a tenseness crept to the muscles. Deep within their bodies chemical changes took place that they did not know about. Each tendon sent in an order for an extra supply of blood, each nerve cell gave the command to clear the decks for action.

Markle bent to the stone ledge, picked up a heavy hunting rifle he had laid there when they climbed the pyramid.

Burstone saw the movement but said nothing.

And now a new note came into the sobbing of the drums.

At first it had been questioning, complaining; now it was compelling. And it threatened. Definitely it threatened. All living things that moved upon the earth were included in the magnificent sweep of its threat. Subtly yet incisively it voiced a warning.

"They've changed," said Dick Markle.

"I hear it," Doctor Burstone answered.

Somewhere, off to the west where the Andes pushed up toward heaven, the drums were throbbing frenziedly. And now, nearer at hand, another drum took up the beat.

Thum, thum, thum . . . thum, thum, thum. . . . No written word will convey the meaning of the drums.

Zantha knew what they meant. There was no trace of fear on her features when she spoke. Her chin was up. Haughtily, proudly, she faced the west. Somewhere, somehow, she had learned how to die.

"The Wardens are coming for us," she said.

II

"WHO are the Wardens?" Dick questioned. "Why are they coming for us? What will they do?"

"Those whose duty it is to guard Zipantoric, they are coming. They come for you because I named you to be offered on the altar. They come for me because you have touched me, have profaned me. No one may touch the high priestess . . ."

"Zipantoric!" Burstone whistled. "The fire god of the Mayans! Somewhere near here his tomb must still exist, his worship preserved by this lost colony. What a find! Our names will go down in history!" The old ethnologist was wildly excited.

"What will they do to you?" Dick asked, his mind reverting to Zantha.

"I shall see Zipantoric," she answered, her voice a hard whisper in the night.

"Those who see Zipantoric never wish to see anyone else," Burstone interpolated. "She means she will be sacrificed."

"Not while I have a cartridge for this rifle," Markle grimly interrupted.

"Your little weapon will not stop the Wardens," she disdainfully replied. Markle could not grasp the meaning of the thought image that she used.

"I pity any Warden that gets in my sights," he answered. "Meanwhile let's start getting out of this country, while we can. Another drum is talking out there, now. If we can make the river, we'll have a chance."

As they scrambled down the pyramid, their way lighted by Burstone's multi-celled flashlight, they heard still another drum start its frenzied pounding.

They moved rapidly. The drums drove them to haste. Deep within their minds long untouched nerve centers

knew what the drums were bunting. For they are old, as old as the race; and fear is older.

Off beyond the rim of the world another drum was booming. The dull throbbing stalked like beasts of prey through the jungle darkness. Like the great carnivora, they were hunting in the night, hunting for something.

Burstone, moving rapidly in advance of Zantha and Markle, marveled at the effect that throbbing note bad on a civilized mind. Wise was he in tbe history of the race. To ethnology he had devoted the study of a life time. The rumble of primitive drums awakened something in him that he scarcely knew existed.

Tbeir camp was but a few hundred yards distant. When they reached it, they found it deserted. The native workers tbey bad employed to help them in excavating the ruins of this lost city had fled into the jungle nigbt.

The savage fears the darkness more than any other thing. His imagination peoples it with hobgoblins, evil spirits. He knows from bitter experience that the beasts of prey are there and he is afraid. Burstone knew this and he marveled at the magnitude of the fear that sent natives to hiding in the place they feared most.

One native alone remained. Pedro, their guide and interpreter, was sulking in the main tent, searching for something to steal before he left. Markle collared him.

"Where are the men, Pedro?"

"They 'fraid, and run off . . ."

"The devil! It's lucky you didn't get away. You can guide us to the river. Pedro, you savvy the drums. What say?"

Pedro squirmed, glanced nervously at the dark forest.

"No can tell."

"Cleanse the filth out of your ears and listen again. What say?"

"Tbey talk of Zipantoric, master. They say . . . he comes . . ."

"How does he . . . Hey! Stop!"

But the guide had slipped around the corner of the tent They saw him once in the light from the still glowing fires, a hronze shadow against the dark green of the environing forest verdure. He slipped past the bole of a gigantic tree and the jungle night swallowed him.

"Pah! He is afraid. The ignorant children of the forest are always full of fear," Zantha spoke. She had remained in the hackground and Pedro bad not seen ber.

MARKLE turned to ber. "Zantha," be spoke slowly, "perhaps you can tell us how we can evade these Wardens. If we can get out of this section we will be safe. Far to the northward there is a great country where we can find refuge. There we can gather many men, and return and sweep this wilderness, hut how can we escape now?"

"No one has ever escaped the Wardens. No one ever will. They follow the trail like bunting dogs until their quarry is captured. We cannot evade them. . . . Are . . . are you full of fear, like a child of the forest?"

"I am not afraid . . . for myself. If you can read my mind, you know why I am afraid."

She placed one hand sbyly on his arm. "Yes. . . . I know. . . . We will try, hut I do not think we will succeed. We must go toward the rising sun, as rapidly as we can. It may be that they will not he ahle to follow swiftly in the darkness."

Burstone went into their tent, came out with a small medicine kit, a knapsack of food, a rifle, extra ammunition.

"Get another light, extra hatteries, a light pack of food," he said to his young assistant. . . . "Let's get out of here

while we have the opportunity. The natives in all probability have a sound basis for the fear they have shown. I think Zantha knows what she is talking about, too. But we'll come back, if we have to bring the marines . . ."

There was a grimness in the tone of the old ethnologist. He meant what be said. He bad seen enough to know tbat fame awaited him here in this wilderness, but fame amounted to little in comparison with the keen scientific curiosity which Zantha had aroused. He knew that sbe belonged to the divergent, dominant group that bad ruled the Mayans in ancient times. From the skeletons found in the hurial places ethnologists knew that the Mayans were dark-skinned, round-headed, short, and sturdy, but rare evidence indicated that another people, a taller people, had ruled tbem, and this ruling class had puzzled etbnologists for years. . . . Unquestionably Zantha belonged to that class. She would have at her finger tips the culture of the lost people, could explain their dispersion. Perbaps she could explain that golden bubhle in which sbe had been transported from that lost city of the west to the peak of tbe Pyramid of the Sun.

She was waiting beside bim while Markle rummaged in the tent. He spoke to her.

"Zantha, how did you reach the top of the pyramid where we found you? What was the appearance of fire tbat surrounded you?"

"The knowledge of its operation is not mine. I was sent out from the tomb in accordance with the ritual, to designate who sball see his face, the Great One. I enter a small chamher there, and move as I will to move. When your son leaped into the buhhle, tbe force was broken. I do not know how it operates. It had always been there, since the Great One came from the sky . . ."

"My son?" Burstone was puzzled.

"The young man, whom you call now Deeck and now Mar-kel. Is he not your son?"

"No," Burstone answered. "I wish he was, but I have no son."

"He oheys you."

"Yes. He is my assistant. We have been studying the Mayan ruins here."

"I do not understand. If be is not your son is he your slave?"

"He is neither. In our civilization there are no slaves, except economic ones. Here he is now, ready to go. Later, Zantha, I will explain to you. If there is a later," be added, turning an ear to the sky where the thum-thum-thum-thum of the drums reverberated.

TOWARD the east they went, Burstone leading the way and Markle bringing up the rear. There was only a vestige of a trail which they had cleared wben they entered this section. The fast growing vegetation had already reclaimed it in places. Thorns snatched at them, creeping hriars tore at their clothes, low limbs obstructed tbeir way. Dick, bringing up the rear, knew those hriars must be tearing Zantha's hare legs, hut he never heard a whimper out of her.

A mile, two miles, they fought their way forward. The heat of the drums kept pace with them, urged them to greater haste.

Tbey topped a small hill. Burstone's light caught an ohject on the ground. A man lay there.

"Pedro," said Burstone tersely, bending over the prone figure.

Zantha and Markle came up. Markle held a light while Burstone llfted the head of the native in his arms. A narrow livid hurn was seered across his face, cut to the bone. It touched the right eye and the eye-ball was a charred mass, arched down across the nose, which showed as a gaping hole, lay bare the right cheek. so that the teeth and

jawbones were visible, cut a nasty gash across the right shoulder and arm. Another burn sbowed in the lower chest and angled downward toward the stomach.

Pedro opened his left eye, and in that single orb was madness. He tried to squirm away into the darkness, hut no strength was left in his body.

"Easy, Pedro," Burstone soothed. "We are your friends. What happened?"

Broken, halting native dialect came gaspingly from the torn lips. His voice was whining, pleading. Markle could not understand the words hut Burstone leaned closer.

"Gods with tongues of fire from the grave of the fire god," the ethnologist translated. "He says they chased him, and they touched him with their tongues, which hurned like fire. He says he ran away from us because the drums talked of the fire god, saying that the voice of the fire god had whispered in the night, and that the men who serve the fire god were abroad, seeking, seeking, seeking . . ."

Markle was sick at his stomacb, sick with the meaning of the words and sick with nausea at the sight of the gaping teeth visihle through the torn lips.

"He says they are bere, now, watching us. . . . He says . . ."

The bead of the native dropped lower. He died.

Very gently Burstone laid the torn body back on the earth. His eyes stabbed questions at Zantha.

"The poor forest child was struck hy a beam from the flame rod of a Chosen One. A Warden found him. They have no compassion, these Wardens," there was a tiny tremor in her voice. "So they will treat us, when they find us . . ."

"How does this heat rod work?"

"I do not know. The Wardens point it at anything they wish to destroy, a bright light comes out, and whatever it is pointed at, burns . . ."

"Will it operate from inside the golden buhhle?"

"The Wardens are not permitted to venture into the bubble. That is reserved for Zantha, the bigb priestess."

"I'm glad to learn that," Markle interposed. "I bave been afraid those things would start dropping down on us by the dozens."

"They will not come in that manner, but they will come."

As she spoke a soft glow spread over them. It came on so softly and so smoothly that they scarcely realized it was happening. Zantha's sharp whisper brought Burstone to his feet, and whirled Markle around to face their rear.

TALL, faintly bronzed, statuesque, a man faced them, holding a short rod from which flooded a hlaze of soft light. He was naked except for a glittering belt that circled his waist, bands that enclosed his biceps, and a conical beadpiece. The features were regular, and very calm. No hint or trace of passion sbowed on that face. Neither good nor evil was there. Only a vast calmness that seemed to look down upon the world from a great height, that saw, and understood, and was unmoved. He looked like an ancient god from out of the olden times, before whose eyes had passed unnumbered sacrifices, to whom bad been offered incense and smoke from the burning of flesh upon the altars, who had known fear and worship down the long roll of the centuries, and who was unmoved hy buman suffering.

A Chosen One, a Warden of Zipantoric. . . .

From his weapon streamed soft ligbt, but Markle knew that from that short rod could come a beam that would sear through a human body, he knew it, but

. . . He slipped the safety catch and his rifle roared from his hip.

A tiny hole appeared in the throat of the Warden, a red stream rilled down the bronze chest. . . .

He did not move, but over his face shot a look of shocked surprise. To a Chosen One had come a new thing. It reft his calmness as a mask is torn from a mummer, and the tortured face, for one wild second, was the face of Momus. The bullet, piercing the throat, had shattered the spinal column. . . . He slumped to the earth.

III

MARKLE caught a flash of amazement from the mind of Zantha. She had not thought that this could happen. Before her eyes a Warden had died. What manner of men are these—Markle caught the thought—who can so easily destroy a Chosen One?

"Sweet Joseph!" he heard Burstone mutter.

Markle wanted that short rod from which the soft light flooded. The still fingers of the Warden gripped it. He loosened them, carried it to Zantha, and she showed him how it operated. A tiny button on the side controlled the beam. He pointed it toward the forest, experimented with the button. The soft glow narrowed to a tiny ray, almost faded from sight. The hole of a nearby tree showed a spot of light, then burst into flame.

They left them there, Pedro and the Chosen One, together in death, and went on.

The trail plunged down into a ravine, down which a small stream went. The terrain was rocky, tortuous, hard going. Burstone fought his way through. There was a world of endurance in that wiry old body.

One by one the drums stopped, faded, disappeared. There was silence in the jungle, broken by the whimper of the night wind in the trees, by the rare call of a bird or animal. There was too much silence in the jungle, especially behind them.

Intruding in that silence came the whistles.

Zantha's keen ears heard them first, and she stopped abruptly, Markle stumbled against her, saw that she was listening. He called to Burstone.

Beginning with a faint piping far behind them, they came creeping closer, like elfin voices from the fairy world. Distant, shrill, keen, malevolent, the whistled notes came.

"It is the madness," Zantha whispered.

She caught the question in the minds of the two men.

"All that hear the whistles go mad," she explained. "They skip, they jump, their bodies twitch, their mind goes away from them, they become like children. . . . It hurts . . ."

"Nonsense!" Markle ejaculated. "How can whistles do that?"

"Certain sounds properly pitched can destroy matter," Burstone answered. "I am not familiar with the process, but I know it is a problem of frequency. The right frequency, impinging on a human, could destroy his mind, temporarily or permanently. I suspect that Zantha knows what she is talking about. Compared to the heat ray you have, the whistles would be child's play."

"What can we do?"

"Nothing," Zantha answered, and he caught the hopelessness in her mind. "They will come upon us in the darkness, and we will dance . . ."

"They will dance," he snarled, "if I can find them with this rifle."

"Come on," Burstone ordered. "We

may be able to outdistance them."

He plunged forward at a steady trot that was almost a run.

The booming of the drums had been the vainglorious chest-pounding of a braggart; the whistles incisively voiced a far more deadly menace. High, thin, trilling notes, they were, that started far up in the scale and went beyond hearing. Markle wondered how the Wardens protected themselves from the sound, and questioned Zantha, but she did not know.

NEARER they came, like a pack of whistling dogs hot on the trail of running game. At a spot where gigantic boulders formed a natural fort Markle stopped.

"Take Zantha and go on," he said to Burstone. "I'll give them something to think about for a while, and when they're thinking, I'll catch up with you."

He had forgotten that Zantha could read his thoughts.

"No, Deeck," she said, slipped her hand through his arm. "If you stay, I stay too . . ."

"Beat it while you've got a chance. I can hold them back for a time."

"You mean to die here, that we may have a chance to live," she answered.

Markle groaned. "Burstone, take her with you if you have to drag her. Hurry up. Those infernal screeches are just around the corner and I can already feel them working on me."

The old scientist leaned against a boulder. His breath was coming in great gasping pants.

"No, Dick," he answered. "I . . . I stay here. I can't go on anyhow. This old body . . . has carried me too far now. . . . I'll play Horatius. . . . You take Zantha . . . and go . . . with my blessing. . . ."

The ravine which they had traversed was hideous with a shrill cacophony of sound. From ahead of them, in the direction which they must go, came a shrill blast.

"I guess none of us will go," said Markle, lifting his rifle and peering vainly into the night for a target.

He moved away a few paces, laid his flashlight on a rock so that it would illuminate the trail they had just traversed, flipped the button, and skipped quickly away.

Its broad white beam caught three bronzed figures. Markle's rifle roared once, twice. One man slumped, the second fell and then crawled to the protection of a rock, the third skipped quickly away.

The screeching whistles stopped. A tiny beam of light came fingering over the rock where the flashlight lay, touched it, and the light burst into molten metal. Darkness came down and in the darkness the raucous whistles screamed angrily.

Closer they came, and closer. And shriller. There was a trace of wild, unearthly music in them, the piping that our forebears heard in the notes of the Goat-God. Something of Orpheus was there, whose magic lyre charmed wild beasts and moved trees to dance. They blended into sonorous cadence, moved up the scale, went out of hearing.

Zantha crouched against Markle. He could feel her body tremble. In his brain a wild echo of those shrill sounds beat, and heat, and beat. His fingers were moving, jerking. He lifted his rifle, threw aimless slug after aimless slug into the night.

Back into hearing came the notes, back down the scale. And a soft golden light came, illumining the rocky shelter wherein they crouched.

Markle could see Burstone still leaning against the boulder where he had taken up his position. Lines were etched deep in the face of the ethnologist. As Markle watched he saw him

drop his rifle, saw his fingers flex, his arms jerk. Burstone started shuffling his feet.

In Markle's hrain a trip-hammer beat. It found an echo in his muscles. Each time the hammer fell his muscles jerked. His arms, his legs would not obey his will. He found himself shuffling an aimless two-step.

He saw the hronze figures close in, felt his arms tied behind him, saw Zantha and Burstone taken. The whistles stopped, the trip-hammer subsided in his brain, strength flowed back to his body.

"That way," said a bronze figure pointing. With guards ahead and guards behind, they started hack over the weary trail down which they had fled.

DAWN was in the sky when they reached the City of Zipantoric. It nestled in a depression well below the level of the hills surrounding it.

In the mists of the morning they could glimpse a huge ball surrounded hy smaller structures. In reply to Markle's question Zantha indicated that this was the Tomb of Zipantoric.

They were taken to a small room, cut in solid stone, their bonds were removed, and food was given them.

"Breakfast is served," said Burstone grimly. "Let it be said of us that the condemned men ate a hearty breakfast."

"We will have no other," said Zantha quietly. "Tonight is the night of sacrifice. We shall see Zipantoric."

They finished hreakfast. Markle found a crumpled package of cigarettes in his clothing.

"How do they manage this execution?" he asked, blowing blne smoke toward the ceiling. The hand that held the cigarette tremhled.

Zantha was seated on a stone ledge that ran around the building.

"They will take us . . . inside the temple," she answered. Her voice was a gray echo in the dawn. "We shall see Zipantoric. Then they will bring us out of the temple and tie us to the posts of sacrifice on the ledge around the temple. Fire will leap from the temple peak and we will be destroyed."

"It sounds simple," Burstone commented. "What is the nature of this fire that will destroy us?"

"It is like lightning," she replied. "The high priest, from inside the temple, sets it free."

A further explanation she could not give. She did not know. Sometime in the past there had been a mighty science among the Mayans, but ages had shrouded it, and this lost remnant of a people could not reproduce it. In answer to Burstone's question she told them how tradition handed down from the long past time said that Zipantoric came out of the sky, accompanied hy other fire gods, who left him there and returned to the sky in their balls of fire, with instructions to this people that they were to ward him forever. The fire gods from the sky had given this colony of Mayans much knowledge and wonderful weapons, had taught them how to operate the golden hubble, the rod that hurned, the whistles. They were the Chosen Ones, the Wardens, and their duty was to destroy all strangers who came near. They had been faithful to their trust for many centuries, how many she could not estimate. That was the legend. From what murky source it sprang Burstone could not understand.

"Why do they want to destroy you?" Markle interrupted. "You are one of them, you are their priestess."

"Because I have been touched, have been profaned. They will name a new priestess now."

Markle looked at her. "I'm sorry I touched you. I didn't know . . ."

She came to him. "Do not be sorry, Deeck. . . . Somehow, inside of me, I am a little glad . . ."

He squeezed her hand.

IV

DEATH comes on swift relentless feet to those who know the hour when he will strike. Night soon tossed its dark shroud over the last colony of the Mayans. Markle, looking at Burstone, knew that this day had aged the old scientist. The lines on his face were deeply etched.

In their cell the three waited. And three guards came. Haughty and poised was their bearing, calm, aloof, immobile their faces. Soft golden light blazed from the rods they carried in their hands. Their fingers were ready on the buttons that would turn that soft glow into a searing beam.

Markle closed his mind. He forced himself to be terrified—he did not need much forcing—to cringe. Over his thoughts he put a rigid embargo. Burstone and Zantha did likewise.

Out from their cell the Wardens led them, one guard in front and two behind. Burstone followed the first guard, then Zantha, then Markle.

They reached the open and saw a vast circle of people surrounding the temple. Every head in that throng was turned toward that huge ball, which was beginning to glow with a faintly luminous light.

A lane was clear through the crowd. Down that lane the first guard marched. A muffled drum started throbbing. Its slow measured beat wailed a dirge for the dying.

Zantha walked erect, her head held high. Courage that girl had. Her steps never faltered, her glance never strayed aside.

She would see Zipantoric. She would go to her god, but she would not go as a slave goes, cringing and fearful.

Over the crowd that hemmed in the huge luminous ball a heavy tenseness hung. They were waiting . . . waiting . . .

The guards led on, up the steps of stone that led to the temple. Markle saw the metal posts set around the ledge well above the crowd. A semicircle below each of them was here. Elsewhere the Mayans crowded, but upon these semicircles they did not crowd.

At the top of the steps a somber figure met them. Wearing a mask, garbed in metal bright with ornament, holding the scepter of the Feathered Serpent aloft in his right hand, thin, emaciated, age-weary, the high priest of Zipantoric stood.

Up the stone steps the high priest led them, the guard following, and into the door of the temple. Markle took one look at that door and suppressed an exclamation. It was built of massive metal swung on a strange hinge and it opened and locked from the inside. It opened into a small ante-chamber, which was as Zantha had said. He got ready.

The two guards had just stepped inside the opening when he whirled, his left fist driving out with all the strength in his hardened tendons. It caught one guard squarely in the stomach, and sank in through soft flesh. Breath whistled out of the lungs of the guard and a pained surprise leaped into his eyes. Never before had one revolted when he was to see Zipantoric. That the condemned walk to their doom erect was so firmly rooted in tradition that their hands had not even been bound. Zantha had foretold this.

Without pausing in his stride, Markle crossed with his right. It thudded home on the jaw of the second guard, who dropped his weapon, slipped, and

fell headlong down the steps outside. The first guard had doubled up like a jack-knife, the bronze of his face tinged with green.

It had taken only a second.

Markle needed only one glance to know that he had nothing to fear from the guards behind him for a few minutes. He whirled to help Burstone but he saw that elderly ethnologist was doing a very neat job of throttling the first guard. Zantha had appropriated his heat ray and was holding it trained on the high priest.

It took them less than a minute to kick the two guards and the high priest down the steps and swing shut that massive door.

SURPRISE had gained them a temporary advantage. As the figure of the high priest came rolling down the steps an angry roar burst from the crowd, and as Markle swung shut the door, men were dashing up the steps. A glance at the door told him that it would withstand the charge of an army, and the heavy walls of the temple promised protection from the whistles.

A second door almost as heavy as the first closed the small anteroom. They closed and locked it, and found themselves in a large chamber. Hanging on pegs around the wall were what looked like clumsy diving equipment, and a circular stairway led up to whatever was above.

"Zipantoric rests above," said Zantha. "I have never been in that room. Only the high priest may enter, and those who are to die . . ."

"We'll go up," said Burstone grimly.

He went up. Markle saw him stick his head through the opening, saw him pause, heard an exclamation, and he disappeared into the room above.

Markle and Zantha followed. They found Burstone standing in the center of a large room, a puzzled, dazed expression on his lined face.

In front of him was what looked like a large switchboard, with meters, rheostats, switches, and all the paraphernalia necessary to control a heavy electric current.

"It looks like the switchboard of a power house!" Markle gasped.

"Men, this isn't possible," Burstone muttered, half to himself. "Do you see what I see or am I crazy?"

"Something is wrong somewhere. Here in this room is electrical equipment that unquestionably has been devised by a very advanced science. The Mayan peoples never reached this stage of development."

"The people as a whole did not, but this colony evidently did," Burstone answered. "Man, what a find! The equipment in this room will advance electrical knowledge a hundred years." Burstone had forgotten that he was a man; he only remembered that he was a scientist.

"Yes," Markle replied drily. "If the news ever gets back home. There are a thousand maniacs surrounding this temple who would like nothing better than to cut our throats . . ."

To Zantha their words meant nothing. When they spoke of electricity she got a mental image of lightning flashing down from heaven. She had no idea that this mighty force could be controlled, bent to the will of man. But she held this room in superstitious awe. Tradition told her what reposed in that oblong container off to one side, and it was this coffin-like receptacle rising on two columns a few feet above the floor, that riveted her attention. When Markle approached it she would have called him back, and when he insisted, she moved to his side. He slipped an arm around her, found she was trembling.

"Do not go near that box, Deeck," she begged.

"Why not?"

"Zipantoric is there. He will destroy you . . ."

"He can be no worse than what we have already seen," he answered, moving forward. She went with him.

Markle glanced at the contents and recoiled. His exclamation called Burstone.

He steeled himself to look again.

UTTERLY nnde, bathed in a soft liquid light of the deepest imaginable shade of blue, was Zipantoric. A small body, like that of a child, covered with sparse silver hair and a very wrinkled skin. Weak, spindly legs, rising to a small torso, and out of that, a huge chest, so large that it made the head seem less out of proportion. For that cranium was massive. It looked as if it could contain all the knowledge in all the libraries of the earth and still have room left over for more. Two wrinkled lids marked the closed eyes. The uose was large and straight, the mouth a mere slit. The features were composed in the even calm of death.

"It looks like a dwarf," Markle breathed.

"So it does," Burstone answered. "Like a member of the dwarf races that folk tales say long ago inhahited the earth. But that is not possihle, either, for those legends can be traced back to their source. . . . And hesides, that chest is out of proportion. It looks as if it had heen evolved through centuries spent in high altitudes, in a thin atmosphere, where oxygen is not plentiful."

"It is Zipantoric," Zantha said. "Now we shall die . . ."

Long centuries of tradition told her that those who saw the face of the fire god would die. Markle tried to reassure her, but the fear had been born in her, and reason would not eradicate it.

"We shall die, Deeck," she said calmly. "But I am not afraid."

"Good girl! We aren't dead yet, and before we check out, some of those lads outside are going to he mighty unhappy. They'll have to starve us out. If we could only control that discharge to the posts set around the ledge ontside, they would be plenty uncomfortable. Say!—That's an idea. How do they work that?"

"The high priest, he who wears the jewel of the Great One, remains in here, and causes the lightning to strike. I do not know how it is done, but the lightnings obey none other thau he. Once another priest tried to usurp the power and attempted to set off the lightning, hut the fire consumed him, instead of striking outside the temple . . ."

"An electrical trap," Burstone mused. "If you know the comhination, it works; if you don't know the comhination, it works anyhow. Dick, take a look out of those openings around the wall and see what our friends outside are doing."

Markle did not puzzle over the fact that the openings were closed by several inches of transparent material that resembled glass. They did not remind him of portholes; he had too many other things to think about.

Torches were moving through the vast crowd outside. The people were shifting to and fro; men were running around the ledge of the temple. He recognized the high priest issuing orders. It looked like a disorganized mass of ants, but these were fighting ants, with stings. It was only a question of time, he knew. Perhaps the wise thing to do was to go down and face the crowd. Death would come quicker that way.

A HUM came from inside the room and he whirled. Burstone was standing in front of the mighty switchboard, moving levers and punching buttons.

"You're risking your life!" Markle

shouted, leaping to the side of the scientist.

"Probably there is no danger," Burstone answered. "We know it for a fact that this controls the discharge. I have tried several switches and nothing has happened, except lights have flashed. There are two more switches . . ."

Burstone turned, held out his hand. "Dick . . . I wish you a lot of luck. . . . I have seen much of living. It does not matter if I see no more . . ."

Markle, not understanding, took the outstretched hand. Burstone wrung it, gave him a violent shove.

As he stumbled backward Markle saw the old ethnologist reach up and grasp the switches. His muscles tensed, the poles came down . . .

A jagged streak of yellow flame rent the air, a living spear that clove Burstone's body from head to toe. There came the gruesome odor of burning flesh. His body jerked, sagged downward, his hands forever clenched around the handles of the switches. . .

In the silence that followed when the discharge died out there intruded the soft hushed tinkling of a silver bell . . .

V

MARKLE disengaged the hands, gently laid the old body on the floor. A man had died . . . in the thin hope that others might live . . .

There was an ache in Markle's throat, a gulping ache. A choking cord was tied around his heart, and a mist was before his eyes. . . . During the five years that had elapsed since he had left college Burstone had been a father to him. . . . Now he was dead.

Zantha stood beside him, sorrow showing on her face. That kindly old man, who had never shown fear and never complained, was gone. She had known it would happen, but she had thought it would include her. She could not understand.

Markle was stunned. He did not see the Warden come up the winding stairway, did not know that the heat ray was aimed at him until the brutal command came to turn around and lift his hands.

There wasn't a chance. The ray would sear before he could move. And others were coming up the steps.

It did not matter. The end was written, but it did not seem to matter.

They had seen Zipantoric. Now the lightning would rend them. Dust would blow from the ledge of the temple, and it would be the dust of their bodies, but it did not matter . . .

Zantha stood beside him, straight as an arrow, poised, her head erect . . . Her beautiful body would be seared by a flash of screaming pain.

Die here, under the heat rays. Die fighting. Death was inevitable. Their only choice was in the manner of dying.

He tensed his muscles, prepared to leap at the throat of the Warden.

His muscles wouldn't work, they wouldn't obey his orders. Something was happening to the faces of the Wardens. They weren't looking at him; they were looking over and beyond him . . . In their faces was so vast a fear that it was incomprehensible. . . .

Centers above the higher centers of Markle's mind sent alarmed sensations through his brain cells. He could feel it, something, something, he knew not what . . . was here, was behind him. His whirling movement was instinctive; it did not rise to the level of his conscious mind. A gasping cry choked in his throat.

Blinking the sleep of ages out of his deep-set eyes, sitting up in the casket where he had reposed so long, was he whom the Mayans called Zipantoric. With each passing second life was

flooding through him more vigorously. He shook his head as a sleeper does when he awakens.

Out of the corner of his eyes Markle saw the Wardens drop to the floor. To them a god had risen. Zantha went to her knees, her eyes wide with awed dread. She pleaded with Markle to kneel, but he shook his head. In the back of his mind he had the answer to Zipantoric, yet it was an answer he could scarcely helieve . . .

Zipantoris lifted himself out of the casket, moved mincingly over to the massive switchboard, stared at the body of Burstone, carefully studied the meters.

The back of the creature was turned. With one leap Markle could land astride that body, could throttle the being. It was an avenue of escape, yet it was one that he did not choose to take.

There was a tiny sound from the stairway. Markle turned his head and saw a Warden there, in the act of aiming the heat gun. The Mayan had seen the prostrate bodies of his comrades on the floor and he had not recognized the spindly-legged creature standing in front of the switchboard.

"Watch it!" Markle screamed.

Zipantoric whirled like a cat and a black spot leaped into existence on the panel where the ray struck.

MARKLE got the impression of a tremendous wave of mental force. A look of stunned surprise came over the face of the Mayan. His grip on the gun relaxed, he slid awkwardly out of sight. Zipantoric minced over and peered down the opening. Then he stepped to a port and for a long time his gaze roved over the howling multitude outside.

He turned back to the room, and Markle felt those gleaming, hypnotic eyes fasten on him. He was being commanded, ordered, to think back over the recent past. He found his mind running over all that had happened since the golden bubble had appeared on the Pyramid of the Sun. He could feel his past experiences draining out, draining into the mind of the creature facing him.

There was a grim ghost of a smile on the leathery face of Zipantoric. He turned to Zantha, and Markle knew that he was probing her mind. When he finished with her, she stood up, moved to Markle, stood trembling beside him.

For a long time he questioned the Mayans. Not a word was spoken, not a sound uttered.

Markle knew that the fate of all of them was hanging in the balance. He did not know whether or not he was afraid. His mind was still numb from the shock of Burstone's death and the ordinary emotions were not registering.

Zipantoric came back, looked from Zantha to him. Something heavy pressed on Markle's mind. He was being weighed, all of them were being weighed.

The weight lifted from his mind. Zipantoric had reached a decision.

The Mayans rose from the floor when Zipantoric turned to them. Like zombies, like the living dead, they rose and filed down the steps and out of the room forever.

Zipantoric pulled switches, depressed buttons, on the switchboard. A relay clicked, there was a scream and a throb of current. Markle felt like he weighed a ton and his knees started to buckle. Zantha was clinging to him. Even Zipantoric was holding to a projection on the control panel.

Intuitively Markle knew what he would see when he staggered to the port and looked out, yet he could scarcely helieve his eyes. The city was gone, had vanished.

Far below them, bathed in thin moon-

glow, was the immense globe of the earth. Points of light showed here and there. Thin white clouds passed between them and the dark expanse below.

Markle faced Zipantoric.

"What—" he began.

Zipantoric smiled.

"No, my son," came the answer into his mind. "You are not ready to know all about me. My home is out there in space and I am going home. Long centuries ago I was left here by enemies and a race of earth-people set as guards over me. I slept away the long years until your comrade pulled the switches that set me free . . . Now I am going . . . home . . . Your race is not ready for the knowledge that I have. It must come slowly, through centuries of evolution . . ."

"But what . . . about us?"

Zipantoric continued smiling.

THUS the story almost ends. It needs only two newspaper clippings to supply any necessary further information.

New York City, Aug. 21.—U.P.A.

The earth narrowly missed a collision with a tremendous meteor last night, if the radio reports from three ships in the southern Caribbean are to be credited. Each states that about 10 o'clock last night a tremendously large ball of fire came flaming up from the south. It dropped from sight a few miles inland and it was first thought to have struck the earth there, but a few minutes later it was again seen in the air rapidly gaining speed and rising. Within a short time it was nothing but a tiny point of light in the sky and it soon vanished entirely.

Astronomers are at a loss to explain the strange behavior of this meteor and are inclined to doubt the veracity of the reports. News from the mainland, however, indicates that the phenomenon was observed there. Searching parties are setting out to investigate the spot where it was reported to have touched the earth.

New York City, Aug. 26.—Via cable from South America.

D. F. Markle, assistant to Dr. E. F. Burstone, ethnologist, who was engaged in excavating Mayan ruins in the vicinity of Cortec, was found near here today by an expedition searching for traces of the giant meteor reported to have fallen in this vicinity on Aug. 21. He reports that Dr. Burstone was killed by an attack of hostile Indians from which he and his companion, a young Indian maiden, barely managed to escape with their lives. They were on the verge of exhaustion. Without weapons they had fought their way through two hundred miles of jungle separating the place where they were found from the ruins they had been excavating. They were rushed on board ship and are now on their way to this country.

THE END



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In this first issue of DYNAMIC we are taking the opportunity of answering the overflow mail of MARVEL, our companion magazine.

Write us your questions on scientific subjects. So far as space permits, all will be answered in these columns. Preference is given to those which seem of the most general interest. Tell us what you think of our choice.

DEUTERONS AND DASHMEN

(Heavy Water and Light Feet)

Dear Sir:

It appears to me that science has completely disregarded athletics in its investigations. Don't you think it has overlooked an opportunity for profitable research?—V. S., St. Clair, Mo.

The loss is probably to the athletes rather than the scientists, who will be some time applying the results of the other investigations with which they seek to aid mankind as a whole; but as an example of science's insatiable curiosity, General Electric engineers have recently measured the speed of a boxer's punch. Two photo-electric cells were placed a foot apart so that the subject's flying fist intercepted their light beams and successively started and stopped a split-second timer. Results showed that the boxer hit at the rate of 40.2 miles per hour!

Another investigator — a woman, strange to relate—has taken x-ray pictures of a baseball pitcher's grip in hurling the rawhide. Fast balls, slow balls, knuckle and curved balls were the objects of her study, but wags have cast doubt on its seriousness by pointing out that her subject was a southpaw. Just the same, we believe we're not alone in wishing for a peep at a shadow picture of Feller's or Dean's fingers as they let go at a baffled batter.

A more significant study by medical men has been made of the physiological process of a quintet of the world's greatest middle distance runners, including Lash, Cunningham, Venzke, Romani, and Fenske. Their speed was found to depend largely upon the ability to attain a relatively high oxygen intake. Other trained runners, however, though not as fast as this record-breaking group of Olympic heroes, nearly equaled them in this respect. Only one factor could be found which might be considered an inherent physiological superiority of a superlative runner rather than the result of his better or harder training. That was Lash's peculiar ability to raise his metabolic rate, when racing, to 21.4 times its basal level, an increase above that of runners of equal experience.

As a result of this discovery, the interesting possibility occurs that in the future runners may be handicapped on the basis of their metabolisms. This becomes possible since Ohio State University physiologists have discovered that cortin, an extract of the cortex of the adrenal glands, increases muscular efficiency by lowering oxygen needs. Large doses of the extract are required, and it may be that the handicappers will instead turn to the product of the physicist, deuterium or heavy water.

Containing double weight atoms of hydrogen known as deuterons, heavy water has strange effects on animals. Experiments with mice have shown that it is a strong stimulant to the sympathetic nervous system, causing the hair to stand on end and the eyes to bulge, and that it speeds up the physiological processes twenty per cent or more. This latter quality makes it a perfect compensation for the runner with a low basal metabolism. But it is a strange picture we are brought of the track meet of the future, with wild-eyed dashmen hurling their deuteron-charged bodies at the finish tape.

Yet scientists have found much to criticize in the handling of present day meets. Disregarding the fact that sound waves travel slowly, starters in some meets fire the gun from such a

position that the runners do not hear the report for from one to four-tenths of a second after the race has officially began. Times made in different meets are not properly comparable under such circumstances. Similarly, in weight throwing events, officials often fail to realize the importance of the relative elevations of throwing circle and landing point. Results are measured to the fraction of an inch, but in the shot put, when the flight of the weight at its terminus is about 45° to the horizontal, the measured length of the put will be in error by the same amount as the discrepancy in elevation, which may easily be two full inches. In the discus throw, because of the flatter trajectory of the discus, the effect is three times as serious.

But the greatest single mistake made is failing to take gravity into account in comparing records made in different parts of the world. Weights are actually heavier at some places than others. Jack Torrence's 57′ 1″ shot put at Oslo, Norway, would have been worth an extra inch at Rome! At the equator, where the gravitational influence decreases still further in conformity with the formula of the inverse ratio of the square of the distance of the attracting bodies, the shot would have sailed another two inches on the same heave. For the discus and hammer throws the additional distance would be still greater and a good toss of the javelin would be extended more than a foot!

And if it still seems that the scientists are splitting hairs, remember that world records are often built on fractions, the tiny bit *extra* at the *end*. In fact, take a table of the values of the acceleration of gravity, available for nearly any place on earth, and after rectifying marks for this factor, see how many world records change!

If you'd rather leave that to us, we'll do it in a subsequent issue and instead let you work this problem with this necessary data given: How high could Walker Johnson jump, assuming he could duplicate his world record effort of 6′ 10″, on an asteroid with one hundredth of the earth's diameter and the same density?

Simple, yet it will give you a chance to apply your knowledge of science to athletics.

CHIPS OF CREATION

Dear Sir:

How much is actually known concerning the origin of meteors? I read so many conflicting statements.—A. K., Minneapolis, Minn.

It is little more than a hundred years since the discovery that meteors were actually celestial bodies and not terrestrial or atmospheric. At that time the meteor paths in a great fall or "shower" were traced back to a common center in the constellation Leo. Soon it was advanced that there was a connection between the orbits of meteors and comets. Subsequent study has confirmed the conclusion and today at least six of the great meteor streams through which the earth passes annually have been identified with the paths of comets. Hence the theory that they are the debris of disintegrated comets whose matter has been distributed around their orbits.

So much for the meteor swarms, but what of the individual meteors that fall each day in countless numbers? One theory holds them to be fragments of two lost planets, brothers of the earth which met destruction in some cosmic cataclysm about 100,000,000 years ago. Another considers them tiny chips left over when the planets were thrown off by the sun two billion years ago or more. The recent discovery of radioactive material in meteors has enabled physicists to date them by the same method used in determining the age of terrestrial minerals— and now neither theory can be completely confirmed!

By this method, different meteors have been found to be as young as 100,000,000 years, as old as two billion. The former could not have had their origin in the sun, for they would have had to stay molten in space for nineteen times as long as they have been solid. And a planet could not be the source of meteors of *both* ages, with such a wide disparity between them. Other data is obviously needed.

That is being supplied by the Harvard Observatory's new meteor speedometer. On the basis of its findings orbital computations have been made that indicate meteors are really minute planets travelling, like the earth,

around the sun. But this proves only that they are *now* members of the solar system. And it gives no clue to the process by which they became independent bodies. Moreover, not *all* the meteors observed had planetary paths. Some had hyperbolic orbits that indicate an origin in interstellar space! Chips of an older, a distant, strange creation!

Whatever their origin, meteors contain no elements not found on the earth. About thirty in all have been found in them, mostly the more common ones. Gold and platinum, however, have occasionally been discovered in small quantities, as have small diamonds. While at least twenty million meteors—some estimates run to a billion!—enter the earth's atmosphere daily, few can reach the ground before exploding from the pressure or burning np from the friction of their great speeds, ranging from nine to fifty miles a second. Only about a thonsand have been recovered. Bnt not even that many bodies of hnman beings oould be recovered from as vast a city as New York if it were visited with a meteorio fall like that whioh in 1908 felled all the trees and killed all the animal life in a 5000 square mile area in Siberia! Such a catastrophe has been suggested as the basis of the Biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

CLOSER STARS

Dear Sir:

In the answers to the quiz in the November issue of MARVEL, your companion s-f magazine, Alpba proxima was given as the closest star. Hasn't a new one been discovered that is closer? —L. A. R., New York City.

The star listed as Wolf 424 *may* be closer. It is not newly discovered, however; its failure to be credited as tops in proximity to the earth is due to the fact that astronomers have been unable after considerable stndy, to determine exactly how far distant it is. The star, with a visual magnitude of 12, can be viewed through only the most powerful telescopes. Its faintness is an obstacle to precise observation, but its parallax has been tentatively figured as eight to nine tenths of a second. If this is confirmed, Wolf 424 is less than four light years distant and is the closest star—little more than twenty million miles away!

TEE UP THE EARTH

A number of readers have expressed further interest in methods of determining the age of the earth (see MARVEL for November). At tbe same time we take this opportunity of answering certain other questions sent in individually but forming a related group.—Ed.

Highly ingenious is the method of calculating earth's age that estimates the time required for the interior to eool sufficiently to prodnce certain observable effects on the surface. Mountain chains are wrinkles produced on the already cool crust by internal shrinking. Together they represent 1.6% of the earth's surface and to raise up their masses the radius of the globe would have had to contract by .8%. The length of time required, computed on the basis of known thermal data, would be about two billion years.

More precise a figure is obtained by measuring the breakdown of radioactive potassium. This is an isotrope with an atomic weight of 40 as oompared with natural potassium at 39.1. K40, as it is known, by liberating an electron becomes a particular type of calcium whioh can be identified. While K40 disintegrates so slowly that only one atom in a billion breaks down in a year, the rate of change into calcium is known and from the amount of the latter discovered in association with it, the age of the earth is fixed at 1,430,000,000 years. It is interesting to note that the potassium clock points so closely to the 1,500,000,000 years indicated by the uranium chronometer.

The discovery of radioactive potassium, a recent one, has also solved at least one scientific mystery. Formerly there was no explanation for the presence of helium gas in old minerals rich in potassium. But now it is known that the formerly unsuspected radioactive isotrope of potassium, when it liberates an electron, is left with an excessive positive charge which it tends to lose by disgorging a helium nucleus. The latter, picking up electrons from

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the surrounding matter, becomes gaseous helium.

Another mystery, the tremendous changes in plant and animal life during the carboniferous age a quarter billion years ago, is also laid at the door of K40. Potassium plays a vital part in life processes and its radioactive variety, formerly four to fifteen times as prevalent, may have been the case of the earlier era's remarkable mutations and rampant growths.

Even less certainty exists concerning the nature of the earth's interior. That there is a definite core some half the diameter of the earth is well established. Thereafter we enter the realm of conjecture. Does the temperature rise observed in bore holes, 30°C for every kilometer, continue to increase indefinitely with the depth? What is the effect of the tremendous mounting pressure? Is the core solid, liquid, or gas—or any one of these in an unfamiliar form?

The latest theory to be propounded approaches the problem with a view to the conditions that must be met. The density of the core must be such as to average with the crustal density of 4.2 to bring the mean density to 5.5. The core must furthermore be less rigid than the shell to meet the requirements of tidal phenomena, and it must have the faculty of obsorbing sheer waves A metallic core heavily occluded, or packed, with some gas such as hydrogen seems best to meet these specifications.

Experiments with the rare metal palladium, occluded with several hundred times its own volume of hydrogen, have revealed it to possess the proper qnalities. If this is the case, the earth may be said to resemble a golf ball, with rough skin and spongy, elastic core! And the cry of the modern Archimedes should be not for a fulcrum but a tee.

The question, however, can not be considered closed. There still remains such puzzles as why it is sixty-three feet farther from New York to London on New Year's Eve than on the Fourth of July,

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Blind biological forces cause these creatures to multiply in disastrous numbers. Blind instinct—or the lack of reason—causes them to follow a course that relieves pressure on the race at the expense of its component parts, the individuals! A deadly parallel has been pointed out between the lemming and man.

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Of little avail to point to temporarily favorable economic conditions, to medicine's slow conquest of disease and age. When plotted on the proper time scale, such a spurt of population growth appears in its true nature of an explosion—or an epidemic! *The result of blind biological forces.*

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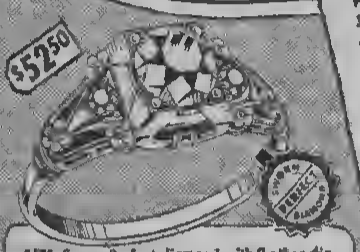
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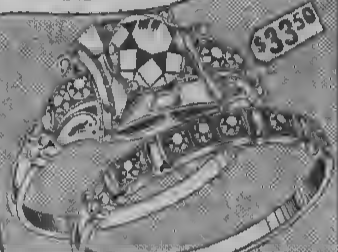
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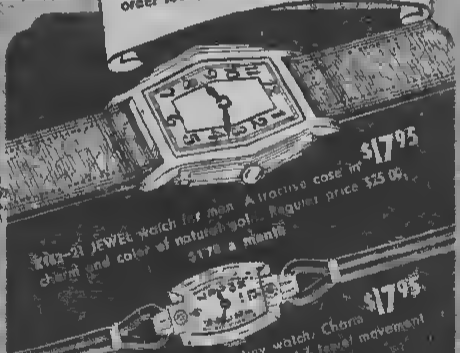
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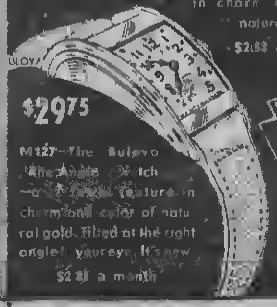


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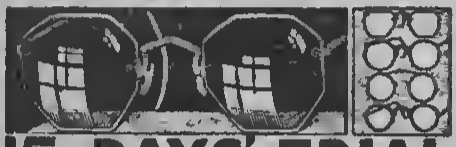
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Answers to Questions on Page 84

1. The most distant observable region of interstellar space which can be photographed by astronomical cameras; the region of the metagalaxies, the largest and most distant galaxies known (7 points for either definition).

2. (a) Antares (2 points), 400 million miles in diameter (3 points); (b) The "dark companion" of Epsilon Aurigae (4 points), estimated at from two to four billion miles (5 points if within this range).

3. A conventional unit of pressure per nnit of area (4 points). The equivalent of the weight of a mercury column one centimeter wide and thirty inches high, at sea level and a temperature of 0° C.; for practical purposes considered equal to .3 lb. per sqnare inch (6 points for either).

4. The ecliptic is that plane, passing through the center of the sun, which contains the orbit of the earth (5 points).

5. An instrument for detecting small amounts of radiation (5 points); it consists of a sealed tube containing gas at such a critical electrical equilibrium that the passage throngh it of any particle causes a discharge (4 points) which can be amplified and heard over a lond speaker (2 points more).

6. Visible light vibrating or travelling in only one direction (7 points).

7. A variant form of an element (4 points), differing from it in atomic weight (3 points), but having practically the same chemical properties (3 points).

8. The rapid oscillatory movement, or dancing, of microscopic particles suspended in liquids (5 points); caused by the bombardment of molecnles of H_2O (5 points).

9. Bnth are metallie elements (4 points). Caesium is the most compressible metal, also the most electropositive (4 points for either); indium is the softest, also has the lowest melting point (4 points for either).

10. An anode is an electrode by which an electric current enters a vessel or tube, a positive conducting terminal (3 points for either); a cathode is the electrode by which the current leaves, a negative terminal (3 points for either). A geode is a stone having a cavity lined with crystals, or the cavity of such a stone (4 points for either). Nematodn is the name of an order of parasitic worms (4 points).



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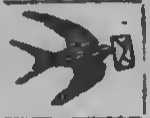
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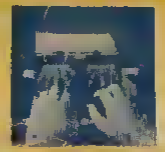
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